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*CAMBRIDGESHIRE CUSTOMS AND
FOLKLORE*

Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore

by

ENID PORTER

with Fenland material provided by

W. H. BARRETT

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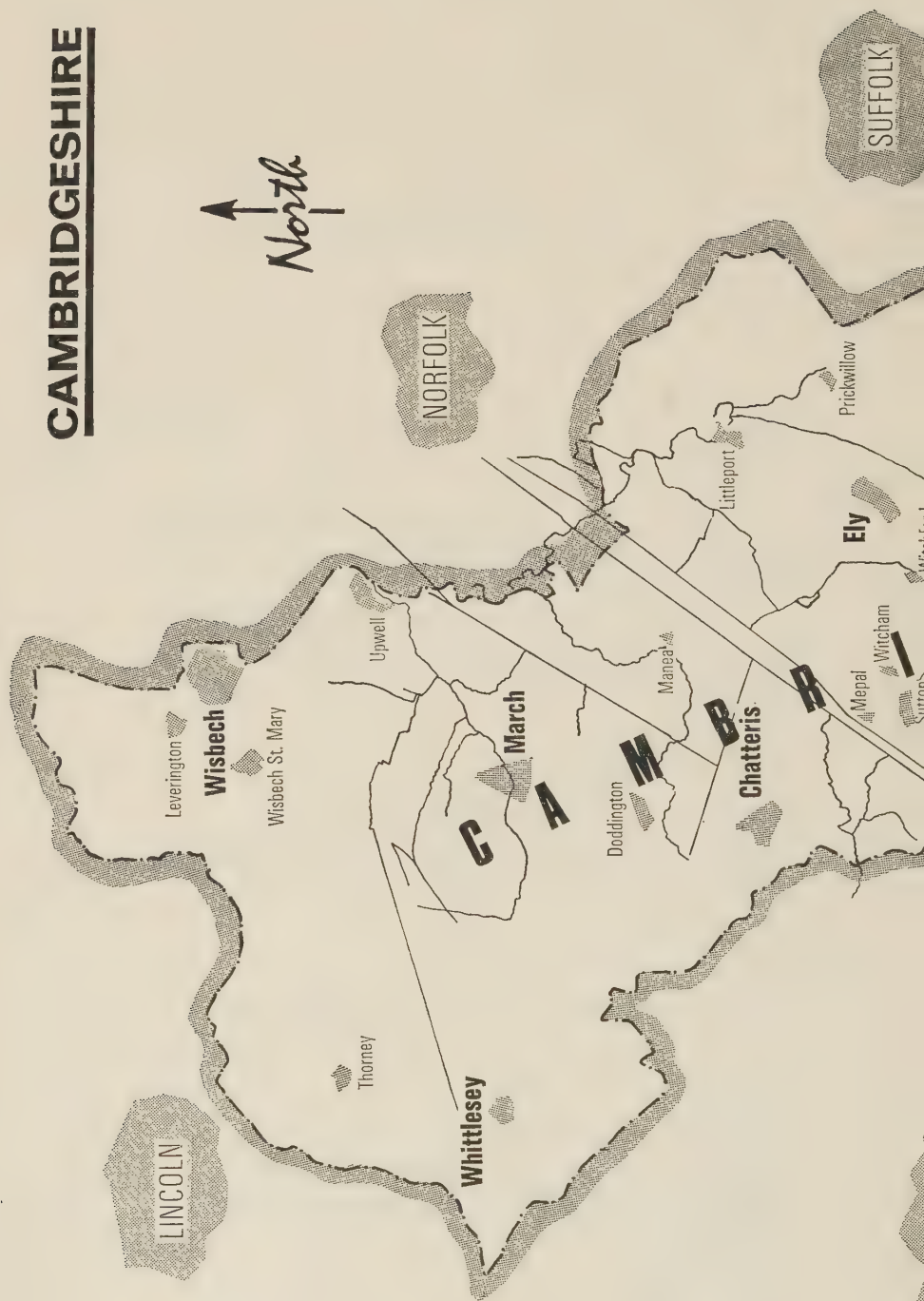
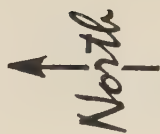
Acknowledgement of Plates

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CAMBRIDGESHIRE



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Introduction

When I was appointed, in 1947, Curator of the Cambridge and County Folk Museum I had the good fortune to work for the first six months under the guidance of the well-known Bedfordshire historian and authority on folk life and folk museums, Thomas W. Bagshawe, F.S.A. Almost at our first meeting he impressed upon me how important it is to make careful record not only of such details as the measurements, construction, material, age and provenance of all accessions to the museum, but also of the local name of each object, the way it was once used, worn or carried, and of everything that can be learned from the donor concerning any local customs, beliefs or traditions associated with it.

To collect information from someone who presents an object to a museum is fairly easy, for the donor is naturally interested in his gift and is willing to answer straightforward questions about it. Even the most ordinary of objects could, as I soon found, provide valuable information on customs and beliefs provided that the very triviality of the accession did not lead to carelessness or neglect in seeking out this information.

Early in 1949, for example, a woman brought to me, apologising for so ordinary a gift, one of the pink paper sheets stuck with pins which many will remember were once given by drapers in lieu of a farthing change. Because the paper bore the name of a Cambridge draper I accepted the gift, and having learned from the donor its possible age we talked for a while of the changes which have occurred in drapery stores. My visitor was about to leave when I was suddenly reminded that, on the preceding evening, an elderly relative had picked up a pin from the floor reciting, as she did so, the couplet

See a pin—then pick it up
And you'll have a year's good luck.

I asked my visitor if she knew the rhyme and received not only an affirmative answer but the recollection of her mother's belief

concerning the unluckiness of black pins which I have quoted in the final section of this book. This incident proved to me the necessity of being constantly on the alert if opportunities of recording folklore and customs were not to be missed.

If Thomas Bagshawe did his best to teach me how museum objects could lead to a knowledge of folk beliefs, he stressed the even greater importance of going out to collect information rather than to sit and wait for it to be brought to me. In attempting to follow his advice I found that the talks which I was invited to give on the Folk Museum, on local and social history, on folklore and on many other subjects, were extremely useful. Throughout this book I have quoted examples of folklore and custom which I learned, over the inevitable mid-evening cup of tea, from members of Women's Institutes, Parent-Teachers' Associations, church organisations, evening classes and a wide variety of other clubs and societies in Cambridge and Cambridgeshire.

As the pages in my notebooks were filled I came to realise more and more that the folklorist, whether professional or amateur—and I count myself only the latter—must not only enjoy meeting people of all types and of all ages for their own sake, but must deal with each person in a different way. The direct question and answer method is excellent for gaining information from people voluntarily taking part in a discussion following a talk or lecture, because they are usually free from shyness and inhibition. This method is not, however, successful in other cases—usually those of country women over the age of seventy—from whom information must be extracted gently and often deviously, with the mind alert to warn when to speak and when to keep silent. Overzealous interrogation can lead to information being given which is obviously false or inaccurate. In common with all folklore collectors I have found that infinite patience is often required, especially when dealing with the very old, who are likely to become confused in thought if they feel they are being pressed to talk. It may, therefore, take several meetings with a person before anything valuable is learned.

The recollection of the Holy Thursday processioning in a Cambridge parish, which I have included in *Calendar Customs*, was related to me by an old woman who lived near the Folk Museum. She often called at my office for a rest before she walked up Castle Hill, and for a talk, for she had, in her younger days, been housekeeper to my great-grandfather. Most of her conversation was often of interesting but, from the folklore and customs point of view, unimportant memories of changes in the Castle Street neighbourhood of Cambridge.

A wedding procession, however, leaving St Giles's Church opposite the Museum, on the occasion of one of her visits, evoked her recollection of the Beating of the Bounds procession which she had seen as a child.

This old lady—she died in 1960—was one of many people who came and still come to the Museum, especially on Saturdays and on Sunday afternoons, not only to view the exhibits but to talk and reminisce about Cambridge and Cambridgeshire. This is, I have found, one of the great advantages of being curator of a small, informal museum. Often an exhibit seen reminds a visitor of something from his youth—the account of the Corn Doll ceremony related under Calendar Customs is an example of this. What I have been able to take down from such welcome visitors has, over the years, been added to what I have learned in carpenters' sheds, in farmyards, in public houses, in fields or listening unashamedly to snatches of conversation in trains, buses and streets. Nor have stays in hospital been wasted. Surrounded by fellow patients from a wide area of Cambridgeshire, I have been able to add to my notebooks, while embarrassed husbands and other visitors, urged to come over to my bedside and talk, have provided me with more material.

No part of my collecting has been made by means of a tape recorder. I have taken notes openly or unobtrusively, as occasion demanded, or memorised when I felt that the sight of pencil and paper would at once alarm an informant and bring his flow of conversation to an abrupt halt. I have always had some misgivings about tape recorders, excellent though these are in the hands of people more professional than I am, especially for the purposes of dialect study. I have had experience, however, of speakers becoming so self-conscious that the resulting tape sounds very different from the person one is used to hearing talk easily and freely. Improvement in recording technique may some day provide a solution.

In 1957 Alan Bloom, author of several books on the Cambridgeshire Fens, visited the Museum and told me that, in the course of writing a book on Fen skaters, he had received a good deal of material from W. H. Barrett of Framingham Pigot in Norfolk. Some of this material he did not require for the book, but he thought it should be preserved, so he suggested that I approached W. H. Barrett for permission to have the records placed in the Folk Museum. I followed his suggestion and so began the long association with Jack Barrett—as he is known to his friends—and with his wife.

By verbal or written answers to innumerable questions which even in his presence have to be written down, because he is totally deaf,

W. H. Barrett has supplied, from his remarkable memory, a vast amount of information about all aspects of Fen life and work. Born in 1891 in Brandon Creek, a hamlet which, though in Norfolk, has the county boundary passing through it, he was able in his youth to observe and note the folklore and customs of both Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. He was a close friend of the last of the real old fenmen and the tales which he heard from them have already been published in his two volumes of *Tales from the Fens*. From all the material he has given me only that which relates to Cambridgeshire has been included in this volume.

Some printed sources have been used for this book, if only to bring together some of the material scattered in diaries, parish histories, memoirs and other works perhaps little known or now out of print. I am indebted to Professor Kenneth Jackson, now of Edinburgh University, to Mr John Saltmarsh, M.A., Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and to Professor Edward Wilson of Emmanuel College for permission to make use of any relevant material in the archives, now in the University Library, of the now defunct Eastern Counties Folklore Society of which they were former officers. To Mr N. Buck and Mr M. Pratt in St John's College Library I am grateful for help in verifying references for me which, with a very full-time occupation, I should sometimes have found difficult to do myself. My uncle, C. C. Scott, too, deserves my thanks for his endless patience in answering, from his knowledge based on seventy-eight years spent wholly in Cambridge, questions on City and University customs. I am grateful, also, for the memory of much that I learned from my grandparents, from my mother and her sister, from my father, who was up at the University at the turn of the century, and from the numerous relations who, when I was a child, seemed to constitute half the population of Cambridge. But above all I am grateful to Thomas Bagshawe, who not only set me out on the path of collecting information on folklore and customs but has, over the past twenty years, been my friend and adviser and has never ceased, from his Sussex home, to give me advice and encouragement.

This survey of the folklore and customs of Cambridgeshire does not claim to be exhaustive. Not every village in the county has been mentioned, partly because, in many cases, similar beliefs and practices were held and observed over a wide area. The traditional dances and songs of the region have not been dealt with in detail, because work in this field is being undertaken by members of the English Folk Dance and Song Society; occupational customs should, it was felt, be dealt with separately.

In writing of Cambridgeshire the University could not, of course, be neglected. From the ceremonial of great occasions in the Senate House down to the humblest detail of undergraduate life and dress, there is such a wealth of custom and tradition that, within the limits of the present book, much had to be omitted. In obscure memoirs on college library shelves, in bursars' offices and in muniment rooms must still be a great deal of material to form the basis, say, of a study of undergraduate customs alone.

Cambridgeshire may not, in its folklore and customs, be the most spectacular of counties: it has no dragons, no fairies, no known mumming plays, but for all that it should not be neglected. There is still much to be done, however, and it is hoped that this survey will, in a small way, serve as an introduction to future work. Up and down the county are still many old and elderly whose memories should be recorded before it is too late, for with the deaths of such people a little bit of folklore dies, too, and our knowledge of tradition and custom is the poorer.

ENID PORTER

1

Folklore and Customs of Human Life

Courtship

Shy young men of the Littleport Fens, until the latter years of the last century, would often make a declaration of their love to the young women of their choice by making a tangible offering instead of putting their proposal into words. W. H. Barrett recalls that the aspirant to a girl's hand would make two tokens each formed of three ears of corn tied together with a straw true-lover's knot.¹ One of these he would pin on his Sunday smock, to the right of his chest and with the ears of corn inclining to the left. The second one he handed, without speaking, to the girl. She took the knot home and placed it before her parents, whereupon a family conference ensued to discuss the suitability or otherwise of the young man, who had to wait until the following Sunday for his answer.

On that day, wearing his knot, he went to the girl's home. She would open the door and he would look anxiously to see how she was wearing her token. If it was pinned to the right side of her dress, he knew that her parents disapproved of him as a future son-in-law; if it was pinned over her heart with the ears of corn pointing to the right, he knew that he was accepted.

The tokens were worn throughout the period of courtship, which was not a long one, since it was traditional that the marriage should take place before the ears of corn shelled out. This avoided such sarcastic remarks from friends and neighbours as: 'Did you have to

¹ Plate 1.

sell the corn to buy the wedding ring?' After the wedding the tokens were carefully preserved.

A less elaborate courtship ritual, but one which also involved the giving of a straw token, was recorded in 1950 from a 79-year-old woman who, until her marriage, lived near Manea. She said that in 1889 her future husband, following village tradition, first showed his feelings for her by giving her, one Sunday evening as she left the church after attending service with her parents, a true-lover's knot roughly made of wheat straw. She was allowed to give a verbal answer to the young man's proposal.

Another form of proposal of marriage by an inarticulate young Fenman was provided by the plant Southernwood (*Artemisia Abrotanus*), known in the Fens as Old Man or Lad's Love. The youth, so W. H. Barrett remembers, would cut some sprigs of the plant and put them in his buttonhole before setting out with the village lads on a spring or early summer evening stroll. Presently, leaving his companions, he would wander along the lanes, where he would find little groups of giggling girls, and would pass by them ostentatiously sniffing at his buttonhole to show that his thoughts were turned towards matrimony. If the girls went by unheeding, he knew that he was unlucky, but if they turned and came slowly back towards him he knew that his herbal decoration had not gone unnoticed. After a show of hesitation he then removed the buttonhole and handed it to the girl of his choice. If she spurned him, she probably threw his offering to the ground and might even smack the bold suitor on his face. If he was acceptable, however, she would inhale the pungent scent of the Lad's Love and, after some teasing from her companions, would put her arm through his and the pair would set off on their first courting stroll.

Girls wishing to make themselves attractive to young men and to be courted by them would often consult the local wise woman¹ and ask for a love potion, ointment or lotion to improve their looks. These were generally made from roses, verbena or other plants and flowers. A popular Cambridgeshire potion was tea or milk in which was dissolved a pinch of Dragon's Blood.² This bright red powder, obtained from the fruit of the *Calamus draco*, was sold by chemists and within living memory the wooden drawers lining old-fashioned chemists' shops in Cambridge and elsewhere were stained scarlet from the powder they had once contained.

¹ This name was sometimes given to the midwife and nurse of a village or parish. It could also be applied to a woman credited with a knowledge of witchcraft.

² Plate 1.

Girls of the Littleport Fens, W. H. Barrett recalls, until the end of the last century placed great faith in yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) as a love herb. They pinned bunches of the flowers on their dresses and seized every opportunity to get as near as possible to the young men they favoured to show that they were declaring their love by means of their buttonholes. If a girl found that the lad she wished to marry ignored the hint, then she would wait for a full moon, and at midnight, go to a patch of yarrow and walk barefooted among the flowers. After this she would shut her eyes, bend down and pick a bunch and, on returning home, put the flowers under her bed or in a drawer. If she found at dawn that the dew was still on the yarrow, then she was content—her young man would begin to court her in earnest. If, on the other hand, the flowers were dry, then the ritual would have to be repeated at the next full moon.

A Fenland courting custom of the last century was related to W. H. Barrett by his grandmother. Nearly every woman's wardrobe then included a fur tippet.¹ When a couple were 'going steady' together the young man would obtain ferret or stoat skins or, failing these, a cat's skin, cure them himself and then he and his young woman would sew them together into a tippet, lining it with silk or satin. Between the skin and the lining the girl would place a padding of sheep's wool into which she inserted small silk sachets containing snippets of her own and her future husband's pubic hair, to ensure a happy married life together. The sachet with the man's hair in it was placed in the right-hand end of the tippet, that with the woman's on the left. When the fur was worn round the neck the two ends lay over the wearer's heart. 'Granny' Barrett's tippet was kept throughout her life and buried with her.

When he was a child in the 1890s W. H. Barrett was often puzzled to hear his elders say: 'I wonder when they're going to get married—it's a good while since they started to *bundle*.' Years later he learned the meaning of the words from an old Fenman, Chafer Legge, who told him that *bundling* was a custom brought into the Littleport Fens by Irish labourers who came to the region in search of work. Local girls began to practise it and were even, in some cases, encouraged to do so by their parents. With the coming of Primitive Methodism into the Fens in the mid-nineteenth century the chapel preachers

¹ *Tippet*: a garment, usually of fur or wool, covering the shoulders or the neck and shoulders . . . *O.E.D.* In women's fashions the tippet was usually a long, narrow band of fur worn round the neck so that the ends hung down in front. The nineteenth-century tippet was usually secured by slotting one end through the other.

joined with the Anglican clergy in denouncing the custom and for a time it lapsed. It revived, however, towards the end of the century. W. H. Barrett's father was told by the Vicar of Little Ouse of how the latter, calling one day on a family to reprove the eldest son, who had been caught bundling, received the reply from the culprit's father: 'But, Vicar, you wouldn't buy a horse without getting astride it to see how it trotted.'

The form of bundling in which a father, wishing to get a spinster daughter off his hands, actually tied her to a young man to force the latter to marry her, was not practised in the Fens. In the last century the Fenland droves of trackways leading from cottages and farm-houses to the main road and the villages were so muddy that women rarely went out in winter except to chapel. All courting by young couples had to be done indoors in the girl's house, and as most of the cottages had only one room downstairs love-making in these conditions was a little difficult.

On Saturdays, when men had received their pay, they spent the evening in the local public houses, so that it was usually late when a lad arrived at the home of the girl he was courting. After giving him something to eat, the girl's parents would go upstairs to bed, leaving the young pair sitting by the turf fire. In a corner of the room was a big bag of oat chaff and a blanket or two. Eventually the girl would get up, unroll the makeshift bed and soon she and her young man were settled for the night, the parents upstairs probably fully aware of what was happening. Many a Fen youth must have been thus forced to marry and relieve his father-in-law of the expense of keeping at home an unmarried daughter.

In the homes of more prosperous farmers who did not need, on financial grounds, so urgently to get their daughters off their hands, bundling was done by stealth and without the knowledge or connivance of the girl's parents. The young man, after spending the evening with the young woman and her parents, would get his coat and, after bidding everyone good night, set off apparently for home. Once outside, however, he would stay in hiding until the farmer had come out for his last look round the premises and then, in a short while, the girl's bedroom window would open, a ladder purposely left handy would be set up by the youth and soon the pair would be in bed. Dawn would see the young man noiselessly climbing down the ladder and making his way off across the fen.

Chaffe Legge was instrumental in helping to bring bundling to its final conclusion in the Littleport Fens. When his daughter Susan was being courted he told her young man that the pair must be married

before they started to bundle. Chafer was highly respected in the neighbourhood; his future son-in-law passed on the message to his friends and soon the sight of young Fenmen slinking home in the half-light of early morning became a thing of the past.

A song about bundling was often sung in the taproom of the Ship Inn at Brandon Creek. So far as W. H. Barrett can now recall them, the verses ran:

Now lasses and lads hark to my song,
'Tis bundle together all the night long;
The game is risky, allow me to say;
One can also get damaged rolling in hay.

So when the moon is waxing bright,
Across the fen you make for a light
That brightly shines to beckon you on
To the feather bed she lies upon.
You will find the ladder beside the wall,
Out there for the purpose in case you call.
Raise it quietly, not stopping to linger,
Until, rung by rung, you reach the window.

A gentle tap and the window's wide open,
And in you go with no word spoken.
Tread softly, bor, the boards may creak,
To awaken the father who's fast asleep.

Nip into bed and snuggle down
Beside the warm body in the nightgown.
If her sister is there then rise in a stew—
You can bundle with one but not with two.

Now, lusty lads, just listen to me:
A bundle's a bundle wherever it be.
There's only one ending for me to sing:
The parson won't bless you as he puts on the ring.

Pre-marital intercourse took place in many Cambridgeshire villages outside the Fens, to the concern of local clergy. One minister in Girton, it seems, evolved a means of discouraging it according to the commonplace book¹ of Mr Wale of Shelford. Under the date 24 October 1780, he gives 'a copy of a printed address from a worthy minister to a neighbouring parish':

¹ In 1852 archives of the Wale family of Shelford were discovered in a pantry. From these records, many of which were almost illegible, the Rev. Henry John Wale collected numerous odd notes, recipes, accounts, etc., which Thomas Wale had written in the eighteenth century, and published them in 1883 under the title of *My Grandfather's Pocket Book*.

TO THE YOUNG WOMEN OF GIRTON PARISH

Mr P., having observed with great concern that many of the young women of this parish when they come to be married, are already big with child, and wishing to put a stop to a practice offensive to decency, morality, and often destructive to their own happiness, does hereby promise to every young woman of sober behaviour belonging to the Parish who shall hereafter be married in this church while under the age of twenty-five years that he will, upon the birth of her first child (if that shall happen nine months after the day of the marriage) give her 10s. for ye Christing Dinner and also a silver plate of 10s. value, to be worn upon the breast every Sunday when she comes to Church, with this Inscription,

THE REWARD OF CHASTITY

Marriage

For a girl to marry a man with a surname beginning with the same letter as her own is still said—though perhaps not very seriously nowadays—by many Cambridgeshire people to be unlucky. The usual rhyme quoted is:

Change the name and not the letter
Change for the worse and not the better.

A Fulbourn contributor to *Notes and Queries* in 1859 recorded that young men and women in the county who wished to know the name of their future husbands or wives still, at that date, used to put into their right shoes a two-leaved clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and repeat the rhyme:

A clover of two, a clover of two,
Put it in your right shoe;
The first young man (woman) you meet,
In field, street or lane,
You'll have him (her) or one of his (her) name.

Until early in this century many Cambridgeshire children were told, usually by their grandparents, that if they pared an apple without breaking the peel and then threw the peel over their left shoulder it would form the initial letter of the name of the man they would eventually marry.

The well-known custom of wearing 'something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue' is still observed by many brides in the county on their wedding day.

The majority of brides no longer believe the saying:

Marry in Lent,
Marry to repent.

When a wedding is purposely not arranged to be held in Lent this is solely on religious grounds. The luckiness or unluckiness of the day of the week on which she marries is also of little concern to the modern bride. However, the fact that she married in 1959 on a Friday was blamed by a 24-year-old Cambridge woman for her divorce in 1962.

May weddings were, until late in the nineteenth century, thought unlucky in many parts of Cambridgeshire. In the Fens it was believed that if a thunderstorm occurred during the marriage ceremony the couple would have no children.

To see a chimney sweep on the way to or from the church was, and by some still is, considered to be a lucky omen. Several elderly Cambridgeshire residents have recalled that the presence of a sweep in the churchyard was prearranged in order to bring good fortune to a newly-married pair. W. H. Barrett recalls that in his youth a Fenland best man was responsible for giving the local sweep a shilling and the promise of a gallon of beer to ensure his being ready at the church door to kiss the bride after the wedding ceremony. It was believed that if she was embraced by so dirty a person she would have a horror of dirt and be a clean and tidy housewife.

In his youth W. H. Barrett recalls that old people in Brandon Creek used to declare that March and September were the luckiest months in which to marry and that if the harvest moon shone on the bed of a newly-married pair this ensured a long and happy life for both of them. It was an unlucky omen, however, if a flea was found in the marriage bed; it was believed that the insect had been placed there by a jealous ex-lover of either bride or bridegroom. A quarrel would be sure to follow in the morning when husband and wife would accuse each other of having been unfaithful before the marriage.

Marriages in the Fens were the occasions for a great deal of drinking. When the time came for the bridal couple to retire to bed they were taken outside and given a generous amount of spirits, the guests having already ensured that both bride and groom had, throughout the evening, been well supplied with liquor. Then someone would shout 'Off', and the intoxicated couple would run staggering to the stairs. A watcher had previously hidden himself near the bedroom so that he could report which of the newly-weds had managed to get in bed first. If the bride did so, this was announced as a proof that she was a virgin.

Until the middle of the last century, so W. H. Barrett learned from his parents, it was the custom for a Fenland bride to embroider a cross, as soon as possible after the ceremony, on her husband's wedding smock. The garment was then wrapped in paper and kept in a drawer or chest until after the man's death, when he was buried in it.

W. H. Barrett was told by his grandmother that when she was a girl, early in the last century, brides used to knit candles into the borders of their bed covers to ensure a happy married life. Old women in her youth used to tell young couples to watch their bedroom candle carefully after it had been blown out on their wedding night. If the tip of the wick glowed red, all was well; if no red glow was seen, this showed that either the bride or the bridegroom had been unfaithful to the other before the marriage.

The mother of a betrothed girl would, if she saw a candle flame divide into two as it burned, take this as a sign that the wedding arrangements should be begun, provided that her future son-in-law was willing. If she thought that her daughter's courtship had lasted long enough, she would cunningly cut a candle wick down the centre and so, W. H. Barrett's grandmother recalled, draw attention to the flame when the candle was lit. Brave would be the young man who dared to ignore such a hint.

Post-marital unfaithfulness, whether on the part of husband or wife or both, received public condemnation from neighbours once the matter had become a cause of gossip and scandal in a parish or village. Disapproval was expressed by means of *rough music*, known variously in the county as *tin kettling*, *tinning*, *tin panning* and, in the Fens, as *tinging*.¹ The performance was usually carried out at night on three or more consecutive evenings, though it could be done in daylight as well. The 'music' was produced by the angry neighbours assembling outside the culprit's house and beating on tin trays, saucepans, kettles or any other suitable objects, with sticks, spoons, forks and so on. The desired object was either to shame the offender or offenders or, and this was by far the most usual, to force the person or persons who received the treatment into leaving the district.

The custom persisted until the first decade at least of this century. Adultery was not the only reason for the performance of the music; a nagging wife, a wife-beating husband, a girl who was going to have or had had an illegitimate baby could all be serenaded. In Cambridge, in 1917, rough music was 'played' outside a house in Russell

¹ Outside the Fens *tinging* is the word commonly used for the beating on tin trays to encourage bees to hive.

Street because of the known infidelity of the wife or husband—the witness recalling the incident in 1960 could not recall which.

Eleven years previously a woman in the Mill Road area of Cambridge who, so gossip said, had been the cause of her husband's suicide, not only had a crowd of neighbours playing outside her house at intervals during the days and nights before the man's burial, but on the day of the funeral crowds of people came to the cemetery with their trays, kettles and other 'instruments'. So disorderly a scene followed that the police had to intervene.

It was in about the same year, 1906, a 68-year-old Cambridge resident recalls, that a man and wife were seen moving out of a house in New Street, Cambridge. As the removal men were carrying the furniture into the vans a small crowd of neighbours were banging on trays and saucepans with sticks and spoons.

A Fordham woman recording¹ her memories of life in the village prior to 1920 recalled, in 1965, that tin panning was sometimes performed there:

Once this happened you were disgraced and expected to leave the village for good. I remember this happening several times and in one case the man did leave; but the other stuck it out three or four times before he left.

Tin kettling is also remembered in Toft and Chatteris.

W. H. Barrett took part in what, so far as he can recall, was the last case of tinging in Brandon Creek. This was in 1904 and was directed against a man whom a local girl had married when she was in service in London. The marriage had not been a success, so the girl had returned to her home, to which she was, after a time, traced by her husband, a heavy drinker. Rumours began to spread that he was ill-treating his wife, who often appeared in the village with a black eye or a cut on her face. Then, one winter's night, he came home drunk, dragged her out of bed and threw her out of the house. Two neighbours dealt with him by administering a good beating and then trussing him up with a rope so that the wife could get back into the house. He was quiet for a time after this; then he started to drink again and to treat his wife more cruelly than before, so that the villagers decided it was time to tinge him out.

About fifty men and youths gathered one night with kettles, frying-pans, spoons and anything else which would make a good noise; W. H. Barrett took along an old tin bath and a wooden mallet.

¹ Recorded in 1965 by Mrs E. Driver in an essay entered for a competition organised by the Cambs. Old People's Welfare Council.

The leader of the mob carried a bugle and whenever he blew a blast on this the players stopped and everyone shouted: 'Clear out! Clear out!' This went on for about two hours. On the next night the performance was going to be repeated, but the erring husband had already caught the morning train back to London.

Pregnancy, Birth and Baptism

Old people in the Fens, until the end of the last century, believed, so W. H. Barrett recalls, that the best times for a woman to conceive a child were the nights of March 21st and September 23rd. They also believed that a baby conceived during a thunderstorm would be sure to grow up strong and healthy.

May 1st was not considered a lucky day for a Fenland mother to give birth to a child, and the village midwife—generally referred to as the handywoman—would do her best to prevent a baby due to come into the world on that day from so doing. The expectant mother would be made to jump vigorously up and down on April 30th in an effort to ensure delivery before midnight. If this failed she was given a strong infusion of horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*) and rue (*Ruta graveolens*) to drink, followed by a good dose of gin mixed with laudanum or poppy juice.¹ This put her to sleep for twenty-four hours.

Babies born at midnight were thought in many parts of Cambridgeshire to be fortunate in that they would grow up to be able to foretell the future and, though this might not be considered so lucky a gift, to see ghosts. The same belief was held of babies who were born when clocks were striking the hour.

Fen handywomen distilled a mandrake tea² which they dispensed to childless wives who longed to become mothers. Married couples anxious to start a family would eat salads containing tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*). The plant grew on banks and in meadows on the upland fringes of the Littleport Fens and W. H. Barrett recalls that children were sent long distances to gather the leaves. It was said that where there were wild rabbits there was sure to be tansy and, since these animals are noted for the large families they produce, the plant must have the same effect on human beings. On the other hand, many unmarried Fen girls who became pregnant chewed tansy leaves to procure a miscarriage.

¹ See under *Curing the Sick*.

² For folk beliefs concerning Mandrake (*mandragora*) see under *Folklore of Plants*.

In the Littleport neighbourhood, from the mid-nineteenth century, single girls and married women who wished to terminate a pregnancy would obtain from 'Granny' Gray of Littleport pills which she made herself from hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) and rue. The green leaves of horseradish (*Cochlearia Armorica*) eaten three times a day were equally valued. Old handywomen also recommended the chewing of hemp leaves (*Cannabis*); this caused severe vomiting, resulting often in a miscarriage.

Several Fenland handywomen used to go to the parsonage on Monday mornings and ask for twelve pennies in exchange for a shilling, stipulating that the pennies must have been in the offertory on Sunday. They would place them in a saucer, pour vinegar over them and leave them to soak until they were covered with verdigris. The resulting green liquid was then strained into a bottle and sold to young girls who had 'married before they were parsoned'. The pennies themselves were not wasted; they were sold to people suffering from ulcers, when, bound to the affected parts, they were a certain cure.

The late Dr Charles Lucas of Burwell was told once, when he was present at the birth of twins, that there used to be a well on the left of Hee Lane, in the village, on the corner of Newnham Street. Water from it, while being considered particularly good for making tea and beer, was also said to cause women who drank it to bear male twins.¹

Married women did not, however, always welcome becoming pregnant, especially in times of poverty and unemployment, when an extra mouth to feed was a serious burden on the family exchequer. W. H. Barrett recalls that a noted Fenland method of the last century of securing a rest from childbearing for a period of two years or so was for the woman to hold a dead man's hand for two minutes. Should she already have several children and wish to have no more babies at all, she would ask the handywoman if she could have the next piece of *corpse money* available. This was a florin which the handywoman placed on the mouth of a corpse immediately after death to pay for the sins of the deceased and to prevent the Devil from taking possession of the soul. The money was kept on the body until the day of the funeral, and no undertaker dared to screw down the coffin until the old woman had removed the coin, which she at once sold for five shillings to the next applicant on her list. If the latter kept the florin under her pillow she felt certain she would have no more children. She had to be careful, however, that her husband

¹ Charles Lucas: *A Fenman's World*, 1930.

did not find the coin, for it was traditional that he would, on his next visit to the local inn, be given some free beer if he told the landlord that he was paying for his drinks with corpse money.

In the days when the Fens were poorly drained, when work, especially in winter, was difficult to obtain, and when unemployment figures were high and wages low, the sex of a coming baby was a matter of some concern to the parents. Boys were usually more welcome than girls, since they could, from the age of 6, earn a few pence a week at bird-scaring or some other odd job. Thus they contributed from an early age to the family's income. Girls were a financial burden for a longer time, though they were probably less unwelcome to the mother than to the father, because they could be of use at home. To ensure the birth of a boy Fenmen did not allow the parsley (*Carum petroselinum* or *Petroselinum crispum*) in their gardens to grow too thick or too tall, because if it did it showed that the wife was 'master' of the house and would bear a girl. In the Burwell Fens the same belief was held of rosemary.¹

A simple method of determining the sex of an unborn baby was for a Fenland couple to sleep with a piece of horseradish under each of their pillows. If the husband's horseradish turned black before his wife's, then the expected child would be a boy, and vice versa.

A Grantchester nurse and midwife who retired in 1951 said in 1966 that she was often asked to hold a length of cotton over the abdomen of a pregnant woman. If the cotton hung straight and motionless, a girl could be expected; if it moved, then the coming child was a boy. This same midwife also said that she never liked accepting red-haired women as baby cases, because, whenever she did so, the birth was a difficult one.

A common belief in South Cambridgeshire, still often quoted, is that if two women pour tea from the same pot during a meal one of them can expect a child within the next twelve months.

The usual belief concerning the effect on an unborn baby of things seen or events experienced by the mother was, and still is in some cases, held in Cambridgeshire. Eating too many strawberries during pregnancy, for example, was thought to cause the child to be born with a 'strawberry mark' on its body. Birthmarks were often interpreted as having the same shape as any object—a cat, a mouse, a bird—by which the mother had been frightened during her pregnancy. Pregnant Fenland wives avoided the sight of a sweep, lest their babies be born with black skins.

A 76-year-old Cambridge man said in 1958 that he had a brother

¹ The same belief is held in S. Cambs. of sage.

who had been born with deformed hands. His mother had always attributed this to the fact that she had been alarmed by a strange dog leaping up and putting its paws on her stomach shortly before the boy was born. During the Second World War a Cambridge woman who gave birth to a mentally-retarded child believed that this was due to the fright caused during her pregnancy by a bomb falling near her house during an air raid.

Dr Mary Bushell of Cambridge recorded¹ in 1936 that a mother brought to the Chesterton Children's Clinic a baby which had a birthmark on its body. The woman said this would soon disappear because she was going to take the child out under the moon every night for a month and rub the mark with her spittle.

The actual stage of giving birth was, as it still is in some cases, attended by many beliefs and customs. Some parts of the Fens were, until well into this century, so isolated and inaccessible in winter that no doctor ventured to the houses situated at the end of long muddy drives except in cases of extreme urgency. The local handywoman or midwife attended all births, and to make things easier for women in labour these old midwives knew the recipe of a pain-killing cake of which the ingredients, learned by W. H. Barrett from his mother, were:

Wholemeal flour.

Hemp seed crushed with a rolling-pin.

Crushed rhubarb root (*Rheum rhabarbarum*).

Dandelion root, grated (*Taraxacum officinale*).

These were mixed to a batter with egg yolks, milk and gin, turned into a tin and baked in a hot oven. At the first groan from the expectant mother a slice of the cake would be handed to her. Many clergy of the last century disapproved of the custom, which, they said, was contrary to the scriptural teaching that children must be borne in travail and sorrow.

It was not only the woman who was given the cake; her husband would receive his share, too, to relieve the sympathetic pain which he was supposed to suffer during his wife's labour. That the father should have some minor illness at this stage, or perhaps at intervals or all through the pregnancy, was firmly believed in Cambridgeshire. The man may, it is believed, even have to take to his bed during his wife's labour or for some time before it. The complaints from which he suffers include gastritis, neuralgia, neuritis and, most frequently, toothache. In 1936 Edward Wilson recorded:²

¹ Archives of the Eastern Counties Folklore Society, now in the University Library, Cambridge.

² *op. cit.*

My landlady (in Bridge Street, Cambridge) has a sister who has just borne her husband a little girl. I was making the usual enquiries after the baby and her mother and remarked that I thought the man often had a bad time on such occasions.

'Oh yes, she said, 'it makes them ill, you know. I always remember the time that I worked at sugar boiling at Pollit's sweet factory;¹ there was a young man there and he had a terrible time while his wife was carrying. He thought at first it was his teeth so he had them all out; but of course it wasn't and he might as well have kept them in. It lasted all through the nine months and then stopped as soon as the baby came. And you know, he would never have another child after that one.'

A young woman from Bottisham who had her first baby in 1961 said in 1964 that her husband had intermittent attacks of gastritis throughout her pregnancy and suffered a particularly severe one while she was in labour. The trouble cleared up immediately after the birth of the child and he did not suffer at all in 1963 when another child was born.

A Waterbeach woman recalled in 1962 that when her son was born in 1923 her husband was seized with violent intestinal cramp during her labour, 'Just as if he had appendicitis'. Throughout her pregnancy he had suffered from sciatica, 'which he never had before and has never had since'.

In some parts of Cambridgeshire, especially in the north-west of the county, the *placenta* or afterbirth was burned and the number of times it crackled on the fire during the burning was reported to the mother. From this she could tell how many children in all she was going to have.

To keep the caul or membrane enclosing the foetus, a portion of which is often found on the child's head at birth, used to be thought essential. A woman born in Doddington in 1900 said in 1955 that her sister had suffered ill health all her life because the midwife who delivered her had thoughtlessly thrown away the caul.

Possession of a caul, either one's own or one borrowed or even purchased, was and by many still is thought to ensure protection from drowning. The one in which W. H. Barrett was born in 1891 in Brandon Creek was immediately attached, by the Irish doctor attending the birth, to a sheet of brown paper and smoothed out with a cold flat-iron. Before it arrived at its final resting-place in the

¹ *Pollit's Sweet Factory*: the name so appears in the MS. account, but is a misspelling of *Pollard's*. Pollard & Co., sugar boilers and confectioners, were established in Cambridge from c. 1884 until 1934. Their Victoria Confectionery Works were in Garden walk; in addition, until 1921 they had a sweet shop in Petty Cury and, up to c. 1909, another on Peas Hill.

Cambridge Folk Museum, the caul was borrowed by relatives and friends of the Barrett family when they were travelling by sea. It went, wrapped in oiled silk in a tin, with W. H. Barrett's uncle to South Africa in 1899. It was then returned from the Cape only to be re-borrowed for the uncle's homeward voyage in 1902 after the Boer War. A cousin took it in 1905 to Canada and returned it on arrival at Vancouver. W. H. Barrett's brother sailed to Malta with it in 1906, returned it, then sent for it again when he left Malta for Egypt. Several soldiers wrote from France during the First World War asking to borrow the caul; they never asked to have it with them on the voyage from England.

A Cambridgeshire belief held until late in the last century was that possession of a caul bestowed the gift of oratory. Lawyers, therefore, were anxious to obtain one and often advertised for one in national and local newspapers, offering good prices.

Until the 1880s or so there were in the Littleport Fens, so W. H. Barrett heard from his family, a few old women who, while they were not held by their neighbours to be witches, nevertheless let it be known that they knew enough of witchcraft, which they had learned from their grandmothers, to take off any curse or spell. So great was the faith that Fen mothers-to-be had in these women that one of them had to be present when a baby was born so that she could drive the Devil out of the child. As it was naturally impossible for the women to be in attendance at every house where a birth was due, it was thought that babies left without their services, though they might live to a ripe old age, would never really prosper.

The method of driving the Devil away was a simple one. The expectant mother would have had a sixpence ready for weeks. As soon as the baby arrived the old woman, who had been sent for in good time, would snatch up the child, breathe down its throat and then lay it face downwards on her lap. With the words 'Devil away!' she would place the sixpence on the child's buttocks. The baby would inevitably kick and the coin fall off, then she could swear that the Devil had come in, seized the money and disappeared. She failed to say that he had thoughtfully slipped the coin into her pocket before he left.

The *churching* of women after childbirth is a religious practice far less frequently observed in these days than in the past. Until early in this century it was customary for most Cambridgeshire women to be churched, and few of them would have liked to appear in the streets of their village or parish for the first time after the baby's birth unless they were on their way to have the ceremony performed. Roman

Catholic mothers are not now obliged to be churched; they can ask the priest to hold the service—usually immediately after the baby is baptised as an act of thanksgiving for a safe delivery. Churching is not now considered necessary as a purification ceremony.

For a baby to cry while it is being *baptised* is still thought by some people to be a good omen. A Cambridge woman said in 1959 that she felt uneasy because her first grandchild, born that year, did not cry; she was afraid this meant that he was not going to live long. She herself had had a sister who had died at the age of 3 and her mother had often said that this was because the baby had remained perfectly quiet throughout the christening.

In the Fens the Established Church was, until late in the last century, closely linked in people's minds with corruption and reaction. This was in part due to the fact that the Bishop of Ely was for so long a temporal as well as a spiritual lord. In addition to this, when the Fens were drained much hitherto marshy land became cultivable and liable to tithes which enriched the clergy. The clergy, in their turn, were mistrusted. Many of them appointed substitutes to take their services, or failed to do even this, while they themselves lived much of the year in healthier places than the Fens. Services in the parish churches were often infrequently held and the baptism of children was often long delayed or completely neglected. With the spread of nonconformity in the area in the mid-nineteenth century, however, the various sects were active in persuading women to bring their children to be christened; unbaptised adults were urged to come along as well. The Baptists held many services of baptism by immersion in the dykes and rivers, often before a jeering crowd of the unconverted who referred to the ceremonies as *dippings*.

Albert Pell of Wilburton in his *Reminiscences 1820-c. 1908* tells the story of the engineer of a drainage pump who was seen one day carrying buckets of water from the river to his home. Asked why he was doing so he replied: 'There's to be a dipping tomorrow and I and my missus don't intend to drink all them sins as they drift down here.'

Child Care and Education

The eyes of a new-born Fenland baby of the last century, so W. H. Barrett recalls, were bathed every day for the first three weeks of its life with rainwater in which parsley had been infused. The rainwater had to be that which had fallen during a thunderstorm, and since storms occur more often in summer than in winter, babies born

between May and October were said to have stronger eyesight throughout life.

A Fen mother would never suckle her child during a thunder-storm; she would draw off the milk, which was thought to be tainted with brimstone and sulphur, and throw it away. To enrich her milk she would drink plenty of gruel thickened with hempseed ground to a fine powder; this was supposed to have a good effect on the baby's bowels as well as to stop the child from crying.

When a young Fenland couple married they would, before the ceremony, make a present to the local handywoman of a fowl, which she would cook and eat. She then returned the wishbone, tied with red wool, as a good luck token. After the wedding the bride slept with it under her pillow until the birth of the first baby, when the red wool would be transferred to the child's ankle to ensure that the baby grew up straight-limbed and free from rickets.

A bunch of yarrow tied to Fen babies' cradles was said to make the occupants grow up to be happy and even-tempered.

Ailing or fretful babies were soothed, sometimes fatally, by Fen mothers getting men to blow over the children's faces the smoke from the mixture of hemp seed and tobacco which they smoked in their pipes. In many parts of North Cambridgeshire poppy seeds in a piece of rag or even a few drops of laudanum sprinkled on linen were given to babies to suck whenever they were fractious.

T. F. Thiselton Dyer quotes in his *English Folk-Lore* published in 1878 a Cambridgeshire belief recorded in the *Athenaeum* in 1849. This was that a child would die at an early age if ever it referred to itself in the third person or gave itself a nickname. No instance of this belief has been recorded as still held or even remembered. Several instances, however, have been recorded over the past few years of Cambridgeshire mothers deferring the purchase of a perambulator until the baby is actually born.

'We had the offer of a good second-hand pram', said one Cambridge woman in 1961, 'but my husband said it would be tempting Providence to buy one before the baby came in case it didn't live to occupy it.'

This particular couple seemed to have no objection to buying a perambulator which had already been used. Another Cambridge woman, however, in the same year said that when her first baby, born in 1940, had died at the age of eighteen months she was sure that this was because she had bought a perambulator from a mother whose baby had lived for only three days.

The modern practice of holding baby shows seems to have gathered

superstition to it. A 71-year-old retired midwife of Grantchester said in 1966 that she never liked to see any of the babies she had delivered entered for such competitions. In three instances the children had either died or been seriously ill shortly afterwards, even though one of them had been awarded first prize as the 'bonniest baby'.

Most children, even before it became compulsory by law, began from the age of 4 to 5 to receive some form of education, the type of school they attended depending on the financial resources or the social status of their parents. Chantry certificates of Cambridgeshire are missing, but there were probably, as in other counties in the Middle Ages, several monastic, chantry and gild schools. Only the Grammar School at Wisbech is known definitely to have been founded, in the fourteenth century, by the Gild of the Holy Trinity. The King's School at Ely can, however, claim to be the oldest school in the county, with an unbroken tradition of education since the foundation of the monastery by St Etheldreda in AD 673. The monastic seminary, reconstructed by the Charter of Henry VIII and later known as the King's School, was, according to the *Liber Eliensis*,¹ chosen by Queen Emma for the education of her son, afterwards Edward the Confessor.

Church records show that many schools were set up in Cambridgeshire village churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: in a room over the porch of Melbourn Church, for example, or in the chancels of the churches at Girton and Willingham.

Private benefactors endowed many schools in the county in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the free education of children. Dr Pearne founded such a school at Balsham in 1588, Dr Cage one at Burrough Green in 1630, Robert Arkenstall one at Haddenham in 1640, Grace Clark and Dorothy Stane one at Waterbeach in 1687, to name but a few. In Cambridge the present Perse School for Boys was founded as a Free School by the will of Dr Stephen Perse, who died in 1615. The school at Bottisham,² founded in 1639 by John Salisbury, was later, in 1730, endowed by Sir Roger Jenyns, who also left a sum for the annual purchase of green coats, muslin bands, red stockings and green caps with red tassels to be worn by the twenty poor boys attending the school.

In 1723 William Westley left a bequest for the foundation of a school at Whittlesford for the education of thirty boys and fifteen

¹ The *Liber Eliensis* is preserved in the Muniment Room of the Dean and Chapter of Ely. It is thought to have been written mainly by Thomas, an Ely monk of the twelfth century, and contains the history of the monastery from its foundation by St Etheldreda to the time of Nigel, the second Bishop.

² Plate 2.

girls between the ages of 5 and 14 whose parents earned no more than £20 a year. What standard of education the girls received (although reading, sewing and knitting were the only subjects prescribed by Westley) may perhaps be judged by the fact that in 1787 the schoolmistress signed the receipt for her half-yearly salary of £5 with her mark.

In 1853 Lord Hardwicke endowed a school at Wimpole. The children of the labouring poor paid a penny a week, those of servants 'of a higher condition' and of farmers on Lord Hardwicke's estate being charged 7s. 6d. and 10s. a quarter respectively. The children had to know their alphabet before they came to the school and they could not be absent for a week, without satisfactory explanation, under pain of expulsion. Parents were urged to send their children to school 'neat and clean; no finery will be permitted'. The elder scholars were employed to clean the schoolroom.

In the mid-nineteenth century a school was opened in a cottage in Steeple Morden where children, aged between 4 and 8, were taught straw plaiting and the alphabet and had the Bible read to them.

In addition to these charity schools there were throughout the county numerous small dame schools, charging a penny or so a week, and, for children of more prosperous parents, private schools for both day pupils and boarders. Bills sent out by William Carver, who had a private school in Melbourn, and which are now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, show that it was customary for him, in the 1830s, to make an extra charge if a boy slept in a separate bed.

The log books in which head teachers of board schools had daily to enter the number of pupils present and record any event of outstanding note, show that large numbers of children regularly absented themselves on the days when seasonal customs were being observed. Thus many children played truant on St Valentine's Day, on May Day, on Plough Monday and on Guy Fawkes' Day. Cambridge children absented themselves during the times of Midsummer and Stourbridge Fairs and whenever Wombwell's Menagerie or a circus was in the town. Fairs drew many village children from their desks, too, and so did local weddings and funerals and even auction sales in near-by farms. Village children, too, often stayed away from school to help with fruit picking, to take dinners to their fathers working in the harvest fields or merely to watch a meet of the foxhounds.

The custom of hoaxing new arrivals to a school—a form of initiation ceremony—was certainly observed in the 1830s by the sixteen boys who then formed the junior section of the choir of King's College

Chapel, Cambridge. These boys, all day pupils, received a small payment for their services in the choir, a midday dinner and a weekly allowance of bread and cheese, together with tuition given in the schoolroom over the college butteries. Eight of the senior pupils had to wait in the College Hall, the senior boy attending on the dons at the high table. Thomas Case, who entered the school in 1836 at the age of 8, wrote in 1899:¹

The master was also butler of Clare Hall College, rather aged and somewhat asthmatical, not over strict, and religiously avoided cramming; he could be got over for a holiday in more ways than one. . . . Sometimes [his] sons would officiate . . . but the younger was not competent and could not be tolerated . . .

Thomas Case has also described the ordeal which he, and every new boy, had to undergo on entering the school.

The newest arrival had, by tradition 'from time immemorial', to give a tea party to the other pupils, after which he had to undergo the various traditional 'tests' which, being passed, made him a fully-fledged member of the school. In one of these the new boy had to go and 'Catch the Owl', which, he was told, would be found in the vaults used for rubbish and coal dust and accessible by a door just inside the kitchen yard. Above these vaults was a low roof. The initiate had to stand on a step then, holding the sieve used for sifting the coal dust from the cinders, lean over the door sill, which was three or four feet from the floor of the vaults, and, after giving a loud whistle, try to trap the mythical bird. Three or four of the senior boys had, however, stationed themselves on the roof and when they heard their victim whistle they at once emptied over him a pail of dirty water.

Another test to be passed was that of counting the stone balls on the parapet of Clare Bridge. There are apparently fourteen, but if a boy gave this answer he was mocked and jeered at for not knowing that the correct answer is 'thirteen and a bit', a wedge of one ball on the north-west corner of the bridge having, at some unknown date, been cut out.²

The newcomer was then told that he must go and see the 'Blue Rabbits' reported to be visible in certain places at the foot of the high boundary wall of the Fellows' private garden. The boy was held by his seniors so that he could lean over the wall and then, when he had his head and shoulders well down, he was suddenly pushed so that, unable to save himself, he fell into the garden below. Since this

¹ *Memoirs of a King's College Chorister*, 1899.

² Many Cambridge residents still ask visitors to count the stone balls on Clare Bridge.

ceremony was always carried out at a time of the day when it was known that the head gardener was working near by, the luckless lad was inevitably chased and later punished for trespassing. Any boy who gave the secret of any of the tests away—*budging* as tale-telling was called in the school—was liable to painful punishment from his seniors.

The choristers had new black gowns every year, to be worn for the first time on Christmas Day. On the first day of each December it was the custom for the sixteen boys to be measured for their gowns at a tailor's on the corner of King's Parade and St Edward's Passage. Soon after six o'clock in the evening the boys assembled in the workshop on the first floor and were then called down, one by one, to the fitting-room, after which they could either go home or stay in the shop. Most of them preferred to stay, and the newest chorister was by tradition obliged to do so, for after he had returned from being measured all kinds of practical jokes were played on him by way of initiating him into the school. The evening ended with eight or nine of the seniors going to the Hat and Feathers public house in Barton Road to drink hot ale spiced with ginger, after which they chased each other back to Senate House Hill, where they separated and went to their homes.

During the years 1725 to 1763, when Henry Gunning, M.A., was headmaster of the King's School, Ely, the boys used to shelter in bad weather, during their playtime, in the Cathedral. Here they were allowed, apparently without interruption, to spin tops and trundle hoops in the nave. Mr R. G. Saunders, the Archivist of the King's School, who kindly supplied this information in 1967, also referred to a clothing list printed in the school prospectus in c. 1850 to 1860. An umbrella was entered as an essential item to be possessed by every boy. Mr Saunders was reminded of this rule by the growing number of boys who, over the past few years, have come to use umbrellas or even simply to carry them when it is not raining.

A retired Cambridge schoolmaster recalled in 1966 that when he was first teaching in the county, in the early 1920s, boys faced with the cane would rub walnut juice on the palms of their hands in the belief that this lessened the pain of the blows.

Puberty

Until the early years of this century girls, as soon as they reached the age of puberty, had to observe during their menstrual periods the

various inhibitions imposed by tradition. These have been recorded from all parts of the county. Fresh meat could not be touched or handled by a girl during her monthly period or it would go bad; she could not touch the pork being salted in the brine tub lest she caused it to go rancid. Well into this century girls in Cambridge and other towns in the county, as well as those in the villages, were still being told by their mothers and grandmothers that they should on no account wash their hair when they were menstruating.

'You'll have a brain fever or even go mad', seems to have been the usual threatened result if they did so. As late as 1964 an Ely girl of 15 said that she was scolded by her mother for paddling while on holiday at the seaside. Putting her feet in cold water would 'send the blood to your head', she was told. Other Cambridgeshire people can remember being told that putting their hands in cold water would have the same result.

W. H. Barrett recalls that in the Fens north of Ely, until the end of the last century, no girl or woman was allowed to enter a dairy if she was menstruating. It was thought that if she touched the milk pans the cream would not rise to the top of the milk. If she turned the handle of the butter churn the cream would not turn into butter but into a semi-liquid known as *maid's milk*. This was sometimes given to the farm-hands, but was more often thrown away as unfit even for pigs. Care was taken that the cats did not get at it, for if they did they would soon die of mange, while any dog that drank it would go mad.

No Fen woman in childbirth could be looked after by a girl or woman who was menstruating, while in many Primitive Methodist chapels it was forbidden to girls to attend services when they were 'ill at ease', as it was delicately expressed.

Up to the beginning of the present century, recalls W. H. Barrett, a Fenland mother would insist that each of her daughters, as she reached the age of puberty, began to wear a *spencer belt*.¹ This garment, made of white calico, consisted of a two-inch wide waist band, buttoning at one side, with straps attached which passed over the

¹ cf. Version of *The Foggy Dew* (Nottingham Univ. Lib.) which includes the verse:

'Twas in the first part of the night
We passed our time away,
And in the later part of the night,
For she stayed with me till day,
And when broad daylight did appear
She cried, 'I am undone.'
'Oh hold your tongue, you silly young girl,
You have got your spencer belt on.'

shoulders. To the back of the belt or band was stitched a wide piece of calico which passed between the legs and was buttoned to the band in front. The belt had many names locally. They were known as *flaps* and 'she has started wearing flaps' was a phrase often used to describe a young girl of 14 or 15. 'She's a flapper' was an alternative description in use long before the word became widespread in the English language in the 1920s. Old women of the last century referred to the garments as *bittle hats* or *kicking straps*; the wearers often called them *thigh chafers* or *slackers*, taking this last word from the iron plates which, running in a groove and covering the central hole of a wooden dam, controlled, on being raised or lowered, the level of water in a Fenland dyke.

Death and Burial

The howling of dogs, the hooting of owls, the flying of a robin into a house, the bringing of certain plants and flowers indoors, the refusal of cats to stay in a sick person's home—all these were thought in Cambridgeshire to be omens of death in a family. The sudden stopping of a watch or clock in a house where one member of the household is seriously ill still means, to some Cambridgeshire people, that the patient will surely die.

A retired district nurse, aged 70, of Histon, with a long experience of laying out the dead, said in 1965 that she always knew that if rigor mortis was slow to set in in a corpse, or even fail to do so at all, then another death in the same family could be expected within a year. Colour remaining in the cheeks of a corpse had the same meaning for this woman; so, too, had the keeping of a body in a house over a Sunday. Moreover, 'One death in a road or in a village is sure to be followed within a week or so by two more', she declared.

The way that soot dropped from the bars of old-fashioned grates and kitchen ranges or burned on the iron back of the fireplace was watched to see 'if death could be read in it'. The recollections of elderly Cambridgeshire people questioned within recent years about this belief seem to indicate that interpretations of the behaviour of the soot varied considerably. One man of 66, for instance, from Wilbraham, said in 1959 that in his boyhood his mother would sweep away any long, oval piece of soot hanging from the grate bars, declaring that it foretold 'a coffin in the house'. A Coton woman recalled in the same year that such a piece of soot, in her family, meant that a stranger was coming to the house.

'A sudden spark leaping out of the fire, alighting on the fire back and then extinguishing itself, my grandmother used to tell us, meant that we should soon hear news of the death of a relative, friend or neighbour', said a 72-year-old Cambridge man in 1964. 'She always knew, too, that if she wore anything green there'd be a death in the family and she never liked to see anyone else in that colour. "Wear green today, wear black tomorrow," she used to say, and my mother believed this too.'

'Open a grave for one and you'll open it for two', quoted a Westly Waterless woman of 70 in 1960. 'I still believe that because it so often comes true.'

Many elderly people still look for *coffin marks* or *coffin folds* in newly laundered linen, even if they do not now seriously believe, as their grandmothers did, that such creases are omens of death.

A 40-year-old Cambridge woman said in 1965 that she firmly believed that to come out of a room, leaving it empty, and to shut the door but accidentally to leave the light burning, meant that she would shortly hear of the death of a relative or friend.

Many Cambridgeshire people recall that elderly members of their families have spoken of the omens of approaching death which, in the last century, were read in candles. Long strips of melted tallow or wax running down the sides of a candle because the wick had become overlong and had bent over as it burned, were interpreted as coffins, while a candle which suddenly spluttered and went out meant a sudden death. W. H. Barrett recalls that his grandmother used to reckon that her home-made tallow dips should last four hours. If they consumed themselves in less time than this, then someone in the house or in the family was nearing the end of his or her life.

An old man born in Thorney in 1887 said, in 1957, that his mother believed that if there was a thunderstorm when a coffin was in a house there would be another coffin in the same house within twelve months. She had also believed that to find the fire still burning from the night before on three consecutive mornings meant 'news of a death'.

The *taking of the last breath*, that is the placing of a piece of looking-glass over a dying person's mouth, was the usual method of ascertaining the moment and certainty of death. That the windows should be opened in the sickroom to allow an exit for the passing soul was the belief in many Cambridgeshire homes. From Oakington is recorded¹ the belief that a dying person always hears church bells ring.

¹ By Mr J. Saltmarsh, now Fellow of King's College, in 1937. Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

Until early in this century the sexton had to be informed immediately after a death so that the *passing bell* could be tolled in the village or parish church: one pull for a man, two for a woman, three for a child, followed by as many as the age of the deceased. This custom has gradually died out, vanishing more quickly from town parishes than from villages.

Should a master tradesman or shopkeeper have died, or a death have occurred in his immediate family, then wide black boards were placed down the centre of the shop windows and left in position until after the funeral. These boards came into use after the wooden shutters, which were attached to the outside of most shop windows and which were closed following a death, had gradually fallen into disrepair and been removed.

In Cambridge it was the custom for the shutter nearest the door to be kept closed after the death of a shopkeeper or of one of his family; the one farthest away was closed when a neighbouring tradesman had died. A black board was put up in 1954 on the death of the owner of a long-established butcher's shop in Magdalene Street. In 1956 wide bands of black ribbon were observed in a small general shop in East Road. Until the 1880s it was a common practice to tie large bows of black crepe ribbon on the door knockers of more well-to-do houses in which a death had occurred.

Immediately after a death it was usual for the blinds of the house in which the corpse lay to be pulled down and kept in this position until the day of the funeral; a servant or a kindly neighbour saw that they were pulled up again by the time the mourners returned from the church. On the day of the funeral all the residents of the street usually lowered their blinds as the coffin and mourners drove away. These practices seem now to be dying out, particularly in the towns, probably because of the modern custom of removing a body to the undertaker's mortuary to lie there until the burial. It was observed, for example, in 1958 in a residential road in Cambridge, that when a family left the house to go to the church only one house, occupied by people in their seventies, had the blinds drawn.

The use of the mortuary chapel is leading to the disappearance of the old custom of paying more or less ceremonial visits of condolence to a house in which a death has occurred, visits which always included one to the bedroom in which the dead person lay waiting for burial. W. H. Barrett recalls that in the Brandon Creek district, in his youth, such visits of respect and farewell by relatives and friends were known as *viewings*. They were held each evening until the funeral, the visitors being comforted after they had paid their last respects by

glasses of home-made wine and slices of cake. If the dead person was a man it was customary for the last viewing to be done only by men, who thus had an opportunity of inquiring discreetly of the bereaved widow or mother what was going to happen to her husband's or son's tools, boots and so on. Tools were expensive and especially so were the thigh-length leather boots worn by Fen workers, and it was a great saving if these could be obtained for a small payment from relatives of a deceased neighbour. These boots were, however, the only items of apparel which had been worn by a dead person which it was thought 'safe' to wear; otherwise to put on a dead man's clothes meant one's own early departure from life.

A curious custom known to have existed in the Fens north of Ely until early in the last century was that of *sin eating*. An old lady of Little Ouse¹ who died in 1906 wrote the following account of the practice in a penny exercise book which she gave to the Vicar, who once lent it to W. H. Barrett. The latter copied it:

I was the first schoolmistress of the Board School after it was built down in the fen. An aged woman used to come and do my housework; then, after a time, she grew so feeble she could not get out. So it became a habit of mine to go and sit with her of an evening and listen to her recounting the happenings of the days when she was a young woman. This is the story of the Sin Eaters as she told it to me:

'We were all sitting round the hearth; the coffin with the corpse in it was supported on two chairs; a half round of bread with a heap of salt on it was resting on the shroud covering the departed. The flickering fire light seemed to throw ghostly shadows on the walls of the darkened room, and all of us sitting there were feeling nervous. To keep us cheerful, mugs of hot tea with gin in it were handed round. One of the oldest women, who had had more than her share of gin, was in a rambling mood and began to inform us of the office of sin eater and how it was acquired by the visitor we were waiting for. This person, she told us, spoke to no one and she in turn was avoided by all. To qualify for the duty she was coming to undertake she had, in the beginning, drunk herself stupid with poppy tea until her neighbour, getting anxious, sent for the parson. He, on seeing her and after consulting with the one who had sent for him, came to the conclusion that she was past all human aid, so he did his duty by reading the church's prayers for the dying and giving her absolution. Then he left, ordering that two rushlights be placed, one at her head and one at her feet.

'Slowly the fumes of the poppy passed off and, as the rushlights burned themselves out, she sat up and her neighbour informed her that so far as the church was concerned she was dead and gone. All her

¹ This parish is now in Norfolk. It was formed in 1866 from outlying portions of various Norfolk villages and from 3,000 acres of the Cambridgeshire parish of Littleport.

past sins had been wiped away and, as she did not exist any more in the eyes of the church she could not commit any more. Henceforth she could earn her living as a Sin Eater.

‘The old woman had hardly finished speaking when a dog barking across the fen let us know that someone was coming along the drove. Then the latch of the door was lifted and a dirty old woman in a long black cape came into the room, reached for the bread and salt and ate it mouthful by mouthful. After making sure she had dropped no crumbs she held out a skinny hand and thirty pennies, which had been dipped in whitewash to make them look like silver, were handed to her on the ash shovel. One by one she picked them up and then, as silently as she had come in she departed. All of us sitting round the corpse stood up and one of us told the daughter that her mother was now in Heaven because, having no sin, she was freely admitted. We had more tea and gin as we waited for day to break—we were much too afraid to go home in the dark.’

The making of the coffin—the *box* as it was often referred to in rural areas—fell to the local carpenter. Deal or elm were the woods used for the burial of the poor, oak being requested only for the funerals of the wealthy. Coffin-making was usually carried out at night to ensure that the work was completed ready for delivery in the morning. In some parts of the Littleport Fens, so W. H. Barrett recalls, it was thought unlucky for the carpenter to work at night lest the souls of those already in their graves be disturbed by the sound of his hammer. A 75-year-old Cambridge woman recalled in 1967 that, as a child, she lived near a carpenter and coffin-maker near Fitzroy Street. If a death had occurred in the neighbourhood and it was known that this carpenter was going to make the coffin, the old lady’s mother always expressed the hope that the wind would not be blowing in a certain direction; if it did the sound of the coffin making was made audible. ‘Mother always said that hearing the man tapping away meant news of another death.’

In many small, overcrowded cottage homes in Cambridgeshire the presence of a coffin presented a serious problem; often two chairs or the kitchen table provided the only resting-place available. So burials took place as soon as possible after death—on the day following or on the second—thought they could be later in larger and more prosperous homes.

In villages a farm wagon often provided transport for both the corpse and the closest mourners. Friends or relatives acted as coffin-bearers, though there were usually, in every village, men willing to augment their wages by offering their services as bearers in return for a shilling and a pint or so of beer.

When the coffin had been screwed down by the undertaker it was

carried by the bearers and placed on the wagon; by means of a ladder the mourners climbed in to take their places on the raves¹ and then, with the undertaker alongside the driver and the bearers on the tailboard, the horses set off for the church or chapel. A hand bier would often be waiting at the gates of the church for the coffin to be transferred to it and thence to the church door. The same bier bore it after the service to the graveside if this was some way from the church.

The traditional funeral tea—usually of ham and tongue—was waiting for the mourners on their return home. The meal probably lasted for some time, because a village funeral was an occasion for long-separated members of a family to meet and there would be much to talk about.

The coffins of young girls, until early in this century, were often painted white and were borne by white-gloved girls, often wearing white dresses. The bodies of boys were similarly carried by their contemporaries, although, as a 64-year-old Lolworth woman recalled in 1966, the coffins in these cases were generally painted black. The young bearers wore either black gloves or, in one instance she could remember in the village, wide black ribbons passing over their shoulders and tied at their waists.

In towns such as Cambridge, Ely and Wisbech, until the coming of the motor hearse, the glass hearse drawn by plumed horses and followed by the cortège of carriages was a familiar sight. As funeral processions passed along the streets men would raise their caps or hats, a custom which, from observation in Cambridge at least, seems now to be on the wane, and this not only because fewer men are in the habit of wearing hats.

Disappearing is the custom of wearing deep mourning, even by the nearest relatives. The true *widows' weeds*, black clothes and black crepe-veiled hats are no longer seen. It was traditional, until early in this century that a widow should wear black for at least a year after her husband's death, and even at the end of this period she was expected to wear *half-mourning*—subdued shades of grey or mauve—for a further six months. Many people can recall the little white *widows' collars* or narrow neck bands worn by their grandmothers in the first two decades of this century as the first attempt to lighten the deep black of their dresses. Even children were expected to wear black, especially on the death of a parent. Boys were put into black suits or at least wore black ties or arm-bands, while many family photograph albums show small babies wearing wide black sashes

¹ *Raves*: a framework of rails (permanent or removable) added to the sides of a cart to enable a greater load to be carried. *O.E.D.*

round the waist of their white dresses. The black arm-bands worn by friends or distant relatives as a mark of respect are less commonly seen now than earlier in the century. Towards the end of 1966, however, some people were observed wearing them in Cambridge when attending church on the Sunday following a death in the family. So essential was the wearing of mourning when attending any funeral that, as an 80-year-old Cambridge woman said in 1960: 'We always had our "blacks" ready—we never knew when they might be needed. We would never have dreamed of going to a funeral—even a mere neighbour's—unless we had at least a black or dark grey coat to wear and a black hat.'

The custom of using for letter-writing during a period of mourning paper printed with a black border—a wide one if the deceased had been a husband or a wife, a narrower one if a more distant relative—is seldom if ever, now observed. Nor are the black-bordered handkerchiefs, once thought an essential part of mourning costume, in use today. Mourning cards, too, have gone out of fashion, although a Cambridge stationer said in 1965 that there is an occasional request for them. These cards, printed in black or grey and decorated with crosses and lilies, bore the deceased's name, age and date of death together with appropriate texts and pious verses. Their modern replacement is, perhaps, the memorial notices which appear in newspapers on the anniversaries of deaths. The *Cambridge News* publishes each evening long lists of such *In Memoriam* notices, many of them including verses of by no means high literary merit.

No longer do people make and embroider *In Memoriam* book marks, often adorned with a photograph of the deceased person; several examples of these can be seen in the Cambridge Folk Museum, which also possesses the sampler, shown on Plate 3, worked in memory of a Foxton man who died in 1881.

Along with the widows' weeds, the black-edged handkerchiefs and other trappings has gone the mourning jewellery once so popular—black necklaces, watch chains and ear-rings, locketts containing snippets of hair or bracelets made of plaited hair cut from the dead person's head before burial. Such hair ornaments were, of course, equally popular as sentimental trinkets made and worn when the owner of the tresses was happily still alive.

Disappearing, too, is the custom of sending expensive and elaborate wreaths. The majority of death announcements in Cambridgeshire newspapers today ask for 'bunches of flowers' only, or even for no flowers at all to be sent to a funeral. An increasing number of people prefer a donation to be made instead to their dead relative's favourite

charity. Gipsy¹ funerals in Cambridgeshire, however, are remarkable for the large number of wreaths which often fill one or two vans, as well as being placed on the hearse and in the mourners' cars. One such flower-decked funeral took place in Ely in May 1967. Numerous and very elaborate wreaths are also a feature at funerals. Several of which have taken place in Cambridge in this century, of people attached to the fairs.

Many clergy disapprove of artificial flowers being placed on graves in churchyards, although plastic flowers are sometimes seen in the Newmarket Road Cemetery in Cambridge. These are the modern versions of the artificial white flowers under glass domes which, in the memory of so many middle-aged people, so much resembled sugar-icing decorations.

An elderly man in Little Abington recalled in 1958 that after graves in the churchyard of that village had been covered with grass turfs, long sprays of wild roses were cut, the ends of the branches being sharpened so that they could be pushed firmly into the ground. These sprays were arranged in a criss-cross fashion until the whole grave was enclosed in a kind of network. He had been told in his youth a variety of reasons for this custom: that the sprays were merely for decorative purposes; that they were placed there as a protection against rabbits; that they were intended to ward off evil spirits; that they were to prevent body-snatchers from opening the newly interred coffin and selling the corpse to surgeons for dissection.

It was recorded in 1936² that after the funeral of one of the gardeners of Girton College, Cambridge, the bearers of the coffin declared that because the corpse had been carried through the College from one gate to the other the path must henceforth be a public highway because a dead body had passed along it.

The Acts of the seventeenth century which ordered that

no corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague), shall be buried in any shirt, shift, sheet, or shroud . . . other than what is made of sheep's wool only . . . or be put into any coffin lined or faced . . . with any material but sheep's wool only . . .

were, of course, duly complied with in Cambridgeshire, as burial entries in parish registers testify. 'Buried in woollen according to the act' is a statement that occurs repeatedly. That the order was sometimes obeyed in part appears from an observation made by Professor

¹ The gipsies are seldom true Romanies, but are usually termed *diddicoys*. They are caravan dwellers who travel from place to place.

² Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

George Pryme (1781-1868), Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge and several times Member of Parliament for the Borough. His *Autobiographical Recollections*, published in 1870, were edited by his daughter, who wrote the two final chapters dealing with the last years of her father's life. Recalling a drive which she took with her father to Bury St Edmunds in the year before his death, Professor Pryme's daughter wrote of their overtaking a village funeral procession. As they watched it:

We spoke of people being buried in woollen, about which there had recently been a discussion in the Newspaper, and I asked him if he remembered it. He said 'The Act was in force in my young days, but people evaded it, having a dislike to it, like poor Narcissa,¹ and were often wrapped in linen with a woollen outer cloak. They were bad Political Economists in those days, and did not understand that whoever spent 30s. in woollen had not that sum to spend on linen or other produce.'

On the same occasion Professor Pryme's daughter asked her father the meaning of the old phrase 'He lays by the Wall'.

It was, he answered, derived no doubt from the time of the Plague, when they laid the deceased and infected persons outside the wall of the Town. It is an expression I have often heard used, among others by old Bowtell² of the University Library.

Burials at night were customary in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, more particularly in the case of people of some social importance, since the expense of providing candles or torches to illuminate the proceedings could be considerable. In the diary of Samuel Newton,³ an Alderman of Cambridge, which he kept between 1662 and 1717, are several references to the practice.

In 1668, for example, two children of the Alderman's cousin who had died within three days of each other were 'both buried on

¹ A reference to Pope's *Moral Essays*, Ep. I, 11; 246-51:

Odious! in woollen! 'twould a Saint provoke
(Were the last words that poor Narciss spoke)
No, let a charming Chintz, and Brussels lace
Wrap my poor limbs, and shade my lifeless face:
One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead—
And—Betty—give this Cheek a little red.

² John Bowtell (1753-1813), bookbinder at the University Library and a noted antiquary. His MSS., now in Downing College Library, include ten volumes of Cambridge rentals, *Notae de Cantabrigia*, collected by a seventeenth-century Cambridge Alderman, the MS. of Alderman Newton's *Diary* (v. n. 2) and Bowtell's own History of Cambridge.

³ *Diary of Alderman Samuel Newton*, 1662-1717. Edited by J. E. Foster, Camb. Antiq. Soc. 8vo Proc. No. 23, 1890.

Munday night in St Maryes Church in one grave'.¹ His own son, Samuel Newton, who died on Friday, March 26th, 1669, 'was buried in St Edwards South Chancell in Cambr' . . . on the day following being Saturday at night'.² In the same year were buried at night Anne Matthews, a shoemaker's wife who had died of smallpox an hour or two after giving birth to a daughter, and the baby, who died two days later.³ In 1710 the body of Thomas Bendyshe, who had died in London, was 'about 5 or 6 o'clock in the afternoone brought downe and buried in Barrington Church in a little Chapell there'.⁴

Sometimes the burial took place a day or two before the funeral service. Alderman Newton tells us that this occurred in the case of George Griffith, 'Schoolmaster of the Freeschole⁵ in Cambr's hee was laid in the ground in St Edwards Church on Sunday night between 8 and 9 of the clock, his funerall was on Tuesday in the afternoone being the 11th day of January 1686'.⁶

Sir John Huddleston of Sawston, who died in 1557, was buried on November 11th on the north side of the High Altar of the church at six o'clock at night by torchlight. His body was carried into the choir and set on a hearse hung with black cotton cloth 'garnished with Scoochens'⁷ and having on it three 'Rowes of Lights, one above another, & one Branche in the myddest on the Toppe, conteynynge in all lviii⁸ Lights . . . & there on set dyverse Epytaphes both in Latten & English⁹ of hys Prayse & Commendacons'.¹⁰

The last torchlight burials in Cambridge took place in 1797 and 1800.

1800. In this year Dr Glynn died. He was Fellow of King's College and an eminent physician at Cambridge. He was buried in the chapel at night by torchlight, as also was Dr Farmer of Emmanuel College in '97. These were the last.¹¹

Although it was customary for those who had taken their own lives to be buried in unconsecrated ground, an exception seems to have been made in the case of Richard Herring of Cambridge in

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 43. ² *op. cit.*, p. 55. ³ *op. cit.*, p. 55. ⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁵ The Perse School, Cambridge, was originally a free Grammar School.

⁶ *Diary of Ald. Newton*, p. 90.

⁷ *Escutcheon*: the shield or shield-shaped surface on which a coat of arms is depicted. *O.E.D. Hatchments*: square or lozenge-shaped shields depicted with coats of arms—were often hung on the door of the house of a deceased person and later in the church, where they may sometimes be seen today.

⁸ He died at the age of 58.

⁹ See under *University Customs: College Chapels* for further examples of this custom of placing verses on the coffin.

¹⁰ T. F. Teversham: *History of Sawston*, 1942.

¹¹ George Pryme: *Autobiographical Recollections*, 1870, p. 46.

1668. He was the son of Alderman Herring, draper, and early in the morning of November 11th he drowned himself near Garret Hostel Bridge.

. . . he had bin at play at dice the night before being Tewesday night at John Dods at the Red Heart in the Petticury and lost (as was thought) there with a London gamester and cheater above 100¹¹ which as was thought the onely reason he offered vyolence to himselfe, the money was said to be taxmoney received by him for Captain Story, he was buryed in the South Churchyard of Gt St Maryes the same night.¹

Was this a case of Aldermanic privilege?

From Alderman Newton, again, we have further references to the funeral customs observed in the seventeenth century: the wearing of gloves² and ribbons, the food provided after the funeral. Provision was often made in wills for the supply of gloves to mourners; just as often a mourning ring, or money to purchase such a ring, was left by will. In his diary, on January 15th, 1664/5, Alderman Newton gives an account of the funeral in Great St Mary's Church on that day of Mrs Susanna Wells, wife of Alderman Wells who kept the Three Tuns Inn³ on Market Hill in Cambridge:

There was a great funerall but little solemnity, many people but small order, the Colledges served in their Colledge Halls, and the rest of the Towne⁴ at the 3 Tunns and some other houses neere. She was borne by Mr of Arts, no gloues nor ribbons, seruice one cup of claret, one cup of Ipocras⁵ . . . sugar cakes, 2 roles and the best sort onely 2 mackerroons.⁶

At the funeral of Alderman John Ewin in All Saints' Church, Cambridge, on Sunday, 17th April 1668, the six Aldermen who carried the body to the church all had gloves and ribbons. The twenty-four Common Councilmen also had gloves and so did the Aldermen's wives, but they were not provided for the wives of the

¹ *Diary of Ald. Newton*, ed. Foster, p. 37.

² Nineteenth-century Cambs. tradesmen's accounts, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, show that gloves were often purchased by executors of the deceased for wear by mourners at the funeral. Some of the bills show that gloves were supplied by drapers on the understanding that any pairs not used could be returned.

³ This inn became later the Central Hotel. It was pulled down in 1961 and the site is now occupied by Martin's Bank.

⁴ Cambridge did not become a city until 1955. Throughout this book, therefore, the word *town* has been used when referring to events, etc., prior to 1955.

⁵ *Hippocras*: a cordial drink made of wine flavoured with spices, formerly much in vogue. *O.E.D.*

⁶ *Diary of Ald. Newton*, ed. Foster, pp. 8-9.

Councillors. The delicacies consumed on this occasion were '2 sugar cakes and 2 rolls, a cupp of clarett, white and sack'.¹

When Alderman Pedder was buried in St Clement's Church on 13th March 1667 the bearers only had gloves, but there were eight escutcheons on the hearse. Heraldic insignia were important at funerals throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In some MS. account-books² kept by Joseph Mead, Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, with his pupils between 1614 and 1633, are set out in full the funeral expenses of an undergraduate who died only a month after he came up to Christ's College as a Fellow Commoner³ in 1618. He was Ralph Gray, eldest son of Sir Ralph Gray of Chillingham, Northumberland, and he was buried in the Church of St Andrew the Great on July 16th, 1618. Among the items of expenditure on his funeral were some connected with the customs of pinning Greek and Latin verses to the funeral pall of which details are given in the section on *University Customs* later in this book under *College Chapel and University Church*. Mr Mead's accounts also give interesting references to other funeral customs of his day—the perfuming presumably of the body or the room in which the dead man lay, the watching of the corpse by other scholars and the provision of rosewater for the sexton:

To the women that laid him out and wound him, being 4, 4^s. 0^d. For wine &c. to the Schollers that sate up all night with the corse, 5^s. For candle and perfumes, 10^d. A man that sate up and fetcht all things, 1^s. Beere, &c. 9^d.

His funeralls

2 pottel of brewed wine and 16 cakis for the Mr and Fellows meeting in the hall to accompany the herse, 7^s. 4^d. Borrowing black clothes for pulpit and hearse, 2^s. 6^d. Pins for verses, 4^d. 12 scutchions in mettall, 1¹¹.

Sexton

For making grave, 3^s. 4^d: Tolling, 4^d: Knell, 4^d: Sermon bell, 1^s: laying the black cloth, 1^s: (in all) 6^s. Minister, 3^s. 4^d. His coffin, 6^s. 8^d. Rosewater, 10^d. Breaking a ladder with hanging verses and scutcheons, 6^d.

The burial of a deceased person's heart separately from the rest of the body is a custom which has been observed from the twelfth

¹ *op. cit.*, p. 26.

² These were found by Dr John Peile in a drawer in the Muniment Room of Christ's College. His lecture on them, delivered to the Cambridge Antiquarian Society on 17 May 1909, is printed in the Society's Proceedings No. LIV, 1909, pp. 250–61.

³ See under *University Customs: Academical Dress*.

century to the present one. The first substantiated case¹ was that of Robert d'Arbissel in 1117, whose heart was interred in the monastery which he founded at Orsan in the diocese of Bourges, while his body was buried in the Abbey of Fontevrault. In this country the hearts of many kings and queens and those of such distinguished persons as Oliver Cromwell, David Livingstone, Lord Byron and Thomas Hardy have been separately interred.

At Landbeach in Cambridgeshire the discovery of a human heart in the church in 1756 was recorded² by Dr Robert Masters then Vicar of the parish:

Workmen removing excrescence from pillar next the chancel on the North side. This was a stone in form of a rose, 4 ft above floor, and projecting 3 inches from pillar. This had been cemented to pillar only about 1 inch deep. Behind this a stone 4½ inches by 3¼ inches exactly filling up a cavity in the pillar. In the cavity were found 2 covered wooden dishes bound together with a linen cloth. In them were muscular remains of a human heart, evidently embalmed and then wrapped in linen, of which shreds remained. The dishes had afterwards been filled up with vegetable fibre which might have been spikenard. No inscription. Probably deposited there before Reformation and may have been a relic or may have belonged to one of the le Chemberlaynes³ or le Brays.³ Now in British Museum.

The Department of British and Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum verified in January 1967 that their Registers contain the entry of the gift made by the Reverend Robert Masters on April 14th, 1759, of 'The remains of a human heart, inclosed in two paterae or dishes of wood: found in a hollow cut in a stone pillar of the church at Landbeach in Cambridgeshire, covered with the Rose and stone which accompany them'. No trace, however, can be found of the dishes and their contents and it is assumed that they were lost perhaps in the nineteenth century.

A second instance of heart burial in Cambridgeshire occurred at Barnwell Priory some time before the end of the thirteenth century. From 1185 for about a hundred years members of the Pecche family were Patrons of the Priory. Gilbert Pecche, who died in 1291, married twice, his first wife, Matildis de Hastings, dying in London. Unrest in the country prevented her from being interred, as she wished, in the Priory, so her body was buried in the church of St Mary Overy in Southwark (*Sepultum est corpus eius in ecclesia canonicorum beate marie ultra aquam, quia videlicet huc deferri honorifice non potuit tunc*

¹ See Charles Angell Bradford: *Heart Burial*, 1933.

² W. K. Clay: *History of Landbeach*: Camb. Antiq. Soc. 8vo Series, VI, 1859.

³ Lords of the Manors of Landbeach.

*temporis, sicut ipsa optauerat, propter perturbacionem que tunc erat in Anglia).*¹ Her heart, however, was laid, encased in lead, under the high altar in the chapel of Barnwell Priory, Gilbert Pecche giving for this privilege a 10s. annual rent in Cheveley to the Priory (*sed cor eius fuit deportatum in locello plumbeo, et coram magno altari iuxta pueros suos sepultum. In cuius aduento dominus Gilbertus dedit ecclesie nostre docem solidos annui redditus in Chauele*).¹

¹ *Ecclesie de Bernewelle Liber Memorandum*, ed. J. W. Clark, 1907, p. 50.

2

Folklore of Nature

a. Birds

Doves

Doves were popular birds with Fenland people, perhaps on account of the Biblical narrative of the Flood and the incident of the dove returning with an olive branch, thus announcing the abating of the waters. This would naturally appeal to inhabitants of such a flood-ridden region as were the undrained Fens. Until the middle of the last century nearly every cottage had a pair of doves, W. H. Barrett recalls, and it was considered lucky to listen to their cooing, interpreted by Fen dwellers as 'Oh, Betty, my sore toe'. The birds were often given as wedding presents to ensure a happy life for the bridal pair; it was customary, however, when obtaining doves, to offer something other than money in exchange. If cash were paid, then the luck which the birds might bring would be broken.

Hens

Until the end of the last century it was a belief in many parts of Cambridgeshire that it was unlucky to carry fertile hens' eggs over running water—they would at once become infertile. When setting eggs under a broody hen it was necessary to set a clutch of thirteen to ensure that a round dozen would hatch out.

The not uncommon attempts of a hen to crow like a cock was taken, by Fen people, as a sign that the bird was a witch in disguise; in more recent years the belief that general ill luck befalls the owner of such a bird seems more common. A. R. Randell in his *Sixty Years a Fenman*¹ records how, in 1964, he was asked by his neighbour at

¹ Pub. by Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

Friday Bridge near Wisbech to kill a crowing hen. He did so and at once noticed that the misfortunes which had dogged his friend over the preceding months immediately ended.

W. H. Barrett remembers that when he was a boy his mother had, among the few poultry she kept, a black hen which was always trying to crow. This so annoyed an old man who lived next door that one day he came to Mrs Barrett and said: 'If you don't kill that old black hen of yours I shall come and kill it myself, for that bird's nothing but old Mother Thurston¹ turned into a chicken, and unless you wring her neck you'll have all the bad luck the old gal can put on you. I'm telling you straight, a hen that crows like a cockerel is no hen, only a witch with feathers on. So kill it off and I'll sleep the better for knowing you've done it, because I always wake up at dawn and lie there shivering, waiting for that dratted bird to crow.'

Although the Barrett family were attached to the hen, which was a good layer, for the sake of peace they allowed the old man to come one Friday morning and wring its neck, a job he was so pleased to do that he plucked and dressed the bird for them before he went off to work.

That same morning some farm workers, arriving at a near-by rickyard to finish off a haystack which they had left covered overnight by a canvas stack cloth, found old Mother Thurston lying dead at the foot of a ladder propped up against the stack. A broken rung near the top of the ladder showed how she had fallen, and when the stack cloth was taken off a depression in the hay marked where the old woman had spent the night. At the inquest a verdict of accidental death caused by a fall resulting in a broken neck was returned, but the Barretts' neighbour had other views. 'It wor no accident,' he said; 'why, that old black hen's neck was the stiffest I've ever stretched.'

Jackdaws (Corvus monedula)

A Cambridge woman said in 1956 that in 1900, when she was 10 years old, an uncle brought round to her a tame jackdaw for her to have as a pet. He himself had had the bird for some time after he had found it in his garden with a damaged wing which by then had mended. Her mother, however, flatly refused to have the bird in the

¹ Mrs Thurston was declared by Brandon Creek people to be a witch. She spent her life wandering between Brandon Creek and Littleport, sleeping out of doors and begging her food from farmhouses and cottages. Farm labourers would burn bundles of hay on which they knew the old woman had slept, because they feared that if they allowed them to remain in the rickyard, misfortune would result. Information from W. H. Barrett.

house, declaring that she had always been told they brought ill luck with them.

In the Fens, in the last century, the jackdaw was by no means considered a bird of ill omen; in fact if a bride saw one on her way to her wedding it meant that her married life would be happy and prosperous.

Magpies (Pica caudata)

The rhyme concerning the seeing of from one to four magpies is still quoted in Cambridgeshire:

One for sorrow,
Two for mirth,
Three for a wedding,
Four for a birth.

W. H. Barrett recalls that if a pair of magpies was heard chattering in a married couple's garden in the Littleport Fens it was believed that a violent quarrel between husband and wife would follow.

Martins, House (Chelidon urbica)

It is widely held that martins which build on a house bring good fortune to the occupants. A Cambridge woman said in 1960 that, in the preceding year, she had destroyed a nest built on her house 'because the birds made such a mess'. She was sure that two accidents which befell her children shortly afterwards resulted from her action.

Owls¹

Owls are in Cambridgeshire regarded as birds of ill omen. In the Fens they were thought to be witches in disguise and were, if possible shot on sight. Elsewhere they were, and still often are, considered to be portents of death. In 1950, for example, three deaths occurred within a week or so in three families living in a tree-lined road in Cambridge. In each case an owl had, shortly before, been seen on the window sills of the houses concerned, and a resident in the same road, recalling this incident in 1965, remembered how much alarm was aroused in several other households near by.

In 1965 a Cambridgeshire farmer saw one winter's morning, just as it was beginning to get light, about half a dozen owls in a circle on the grass of one of his fields. He felt vaguely uneasy at the sight, not

¹ All varieties of these birds—Tawny, Barn, Long-eared, etc., have the same beliefs attached to them.

only because it was unusual, but because he knew the superstition regarding owls. Later that day the death of Sir Winston Churchill was announced.

Fenland people, W. H. Barrett recalls, would never touch a dead owl, even with the foot, for it was believed that anyone who did so would either break a limb soon afterwards or even die suddenly. In 1954 an old man in Northampton Street, Cambridge, awakened in the preceding night by the hooting of an owl in the near-by grounds of Magdalene College, expressed the fear that it meant that his sister, seriously ill in hospital, would die.

Ravens (Corvus corax)

W. H. Barrett recalls that if a Fenland bride heard a raven croaking as she went to church on her wedding day she would have a large family, but would have to rear the children in poverty.

Robins (gen. Erithacus)

A robin flying into the house is considered by many Cambridgeshire people to be a warning of a sudden death in the family. In 1962 a Cambridge resident, who did not herself hold this belief, said that on the preceding day an elderly woman, a total stranger to her, had knocked at the door to tell her there was a robin on the inside window ledge of the front room. The old lady had offered to help to get the bird out of the house and had seemed very agitated, saying several times: 'Oh dear, I don't like to see this at all; I do hope you haven't anyone ill in the house—robins bring such unhappiness if they get indoors.'

On the other hand, for a robin to fly into a house is by some people thought to foretell either a specific piece of good news or general good fortune.

The old belief concerning the taking of a robin's egg from a nest, or the harming or killing of the bird, was certainly widely held in the county. The purloiner of the egg was thought certain to break or in some way injure the arm or hand which had been used to steal the egg, or to meet with some accident involving injury to other limbs.

Many Cambridgeshire people believe that if a robin taps with its beak on a window pane some disaster will shortly follow.

Fen people, however, encouraged robins to build in the roof thatch, believing that the birds would bring good luck. Once they had built their nests the robins were carefully watched, because, should they desert the house, then a corpse would soon lie inside it.

Rooks (Corvus frugilegus)

It was a Fenland tradition of the last century that rooks always knew when a gamekeeper had died and that they would form into line and fly over his coffin as it was being carried to the church.

Sparrows (Passer domesticus)

Until late in the last century, W. H. Barrett recalls many Fen girls, and especially those engaged to be married, would watch sparrows carefully. If one of these girls saw a sparrow drinking from a pool or from a puddle by the roadside, she knew this meant that her future husband would spend too much time in the public house. If she saw a sparrow having a dust bath, she knew her husband would never mind how dusty or untidy their future home would be.

Wrens (Trogloclites parvulus)

To hear a wren singing in a hedge was, to old Fenmen of the last century, a sign of coming good fortune. It was particularly lucky for a bride to hear the same sound on her way to her wedding.

b. Flowers and Plants

Arum Lily, wild. Also known as *Cuckoo Pint*, *Cuckoo Spit* and, less generally in Cambridgeshire, *Lords and Ladies (Arum Maculatum)*

Old Fenmen in the last century, W. H. Barrett recalls, still held the traditional belief that when the nuns came over from Normandy to build a convent at Thetford in Norfolk¹ they brought with them the wild arum or cuckoo pint. When the monks of Ely later stole the body of St Withburga from East Dereham² and paused, on their way back, to rest at Brandon, tradition has it that the nuns of Thetford came down to the riverside and covered the saint's body with the flowers. During the long journey down the Little Ouse of the barge bearing

¹ The Benedictine nunnery of St George was founded at Thetford in 1176 by the Abbot of Bury for the nuns of Lyng in Norfolk. The French foundation in Thetford was the Cluniac Priory of SS Mary, Peter and Paul, founded in 1104 as a cell to the Abbey of Cluny. (*Kelly's Directory of Norfolk*, 1904 *et al*)

² The church of St Nicholas in E. Dereham stands on the site of the nunnery founded by St Withburga, daughter of Anna, King of the E. Angles and sister of St Etheldreda. When St Withburga's remains were translated to the church a well miraculously sprang where her grave had been and became a place of pilgrimage. The monks of Ely later removed the saint's body and buried it beside that of St Etheldreda in the monastery (later the Cathedral) of Ely.

St Withburga several of the lily flowers fell into the river, where they threw out roots. Within an hour they had covered all the banks as far as Ely with a carpet of blooms and, more remarkable still, these flowers glowed radiantly at night. Fenmen old at the turn of this century could recall that, when a new church was consecrated in the newly formed parish of Little Ouse, the Bishop of Ely in his sermon warned his congregation against all Romish supersitions and practices and stressed that there was no factual foundation to the story of St Withburga and the lilies.

The pollen of the flowers does, in fact, throw off a faint light at dusk and when the Irish labourers came in large numbers to find work in the Fens during the famines in their own country during the last century, they named the lilies *Fairy Lamps*. The Fen lightermen had for long called them *Shiners*.

In the days of harvesting corn with a sickle the blade was often, after being sharpened on the grindstone, rubbed over with an arum flower. This was thought to ensure that the cutting edge would remain keen throughout the harvest.

It was believed in eastern Cambridgeshire that cuckoo pints, if brought into the house, gave tuberculosis to anyone who went near them.

Borage (Borago officinalis)

In the Fens in W. H. Barrett's boyhood borage was known as *Virgin's Robe*. The plant was reputed to give courage to those who ate the leaves, and he recalls that, as a schoolboy, he and his companions often took to school with them for their midday meal bread and butter sandwiched with chopped borage. Lay preachers in the Fenland Methodist and other nonconformist chapels used to insist that borage was one of the plants held up on the point of the spear to the dying Christ on the Cross. Another Fen tradition was that Cromwell's soldiers were able to fight day and night without rest as long as they had borage leaves to chew.

Bulrushes (Scirpus lacustris)

The Fenland name for these is *Cats' Tails* and it was considered very unlucky to bring them into the house. This belief probably goes back to the days before the Fens were drained, when beds of bulrushes were laid down in boggy trackways to ambush travellers daring to penetrate the secret fastnesses of the Fens. Elsewhere in Cambridgeshire people seem quite content to bring bulrushes into the house for decoration.

Cacti

Between 1964 and 1966 three instances have been recorded, two in Cambridge and one in Grantchester, of the belief that it is unlucky to bring any species of cactus into the house. One of the informants said that not only would she never have one of these plants, but that she would never give one to anybody else, 'they're so unlucky'.¹

Elderberry Flowers (flowers of the *Sambucus nigra*)

These were never allowed in the rooms of Fenland houses, because they were supposed to attract snakes and vipers. These reptiles were numerous in the undrained Fens and their habit of coiling up in the roots of elder trees made the flowers unpopular with the superstitious.

Gladiolus

The mixing of red and white gladioli in one vase is still thought to be unlucky by some of the staffs of Cambridgeshire hospitals. In general, however, the putting of any red and white flowers together is disliked, as it foretells a death in the ward. Several instances have been recorded from Cambridgeshire people who will never put these two colours together when arranging flowers in their own homes. The mere addition of a single flower of any other colour is sufficient to avert the ill luck.

Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*)

This plant, in the Fens north of Ely, had close associations with witchcraft. A small patch of the flowers growing beside an ancient trackway across the undrained fenland traditionally showed that a witch had paused there to urinate; large patches showed that witches had gathered on the site to plot their evil deeds. The plant, being a free grower, sometimes appears on the thatch of a roof and this, until the end of the last century, was taken as a sign that a witch had landed on or taken off from the roof on one of her nocturnal flights. Any old Fenman, seeing groundsel growing in his garden, would, W. H. Barrett recalls, angrily tear it up, declaring that 'some wicked old devil had been up to her broomstick tricks again'. It was further believed that witches could never die in winter, but only when groundsel was in flower, so that they could take with them a posy or the flowers by which the Devil would recognise them as his followers.

¹ This belief concerning the unluckiness of cacti is probably due to the spikes which so many of these plants have, *cf.* the custom of handing a coin to the donor of a knife, scissors, etc., to avert the misfortune (usually said to take the form of a quarrel or a break in friendship) which might otherwise follow the giving of such sharp objects.

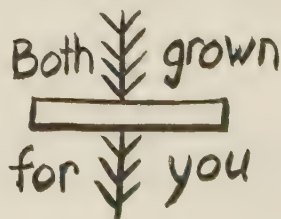
Old Fenmen were happy to be given the tedious task of grubbing up groundsel from cultivated fields. In his youth W. H. Barrett knew one such—old Job Harley of Littleport. He would gather armfuls of the weed and dry them in the sun. When the sixth moon of the year was at its full he would clear a space on the earth floor of the shack in which he lived, pile up the groundsel and set light to it, damping the flames with ale if they rose too high. Then, amid the resulting clouds of white smoke, Job would squat on his haunches and continue alternately to add more groundsel and more liquor until, choking for breath, he would be forced out into the open air. He assured W. H. Barrett that this bonfire not only drove out evil spirits from his shack but also killed the vermin abounding in his clothes and bedding. Inhaling the smoke, too, he was certain was good for his stomach.

Hemp (Cannabis)

This crop was grown from very early times on the Fenland borders of Cambridgeshire and on the island sites on which stand the towns of March, Chatteris, Ely, etc. After the Fens were drained it became one of the chief crops, though a hazardous one for those who worked at cultivating and gathering it. Many villages still have districts or streets known by their ancient name of Hempfield.

By custom women were not allowed to work in the fields; it was thought that merely touching the plant made a young woman barren, while older ones, by so doing, were affected by a very severe rash on their arms, relieved only by the application of caustic soda. Hemp was believed to be the Devil's flower; certainly the cutting of the crop gave the workers severe headaches. Smoking the dried leaf was an alternative to drinking poppy tea—both had the same stupefying effect.

It was an old Fen custom to show a man how unpopular he was after he had broken the Fen code of never betraying or letting down his fellow Fenmen, by drawing on his door this sign:



This was supposed to represent a stem of hemp and a willow stake—reminder of the days when, if a man hung himself, he was buried at the cross-roads with a stake through his body. Hemp was used for

making string, cord and rope, including the hangman's rope, so the drawing was a gentle hint that the man should go and hang himself. W. H. Barrett recalls once seeing this sign on a cottage door near Brandon Creek.

Honeysuckle (Lonicera periclymenum)

This flower was never brought into a Fenland home where there were young girls; it was thought to give them erotic dreams. If any *was* brought indoors, then a wedding would shortly follow.

Hydrangea

A superstition seems to have grown up in recent years¹ that the potted hydrangeas sold by florists are unlucky if brought into the house. This belief has been three times recorded in Cambridge and once in Chatteris. The blue flower seems to be considered more unlucky than the pink.

Ivy (Hedera helix)

Ivy was considered one of the unluckiest of plants to bring into a Fenland home, probably because of its habit of climbing over derelict buildings which so often had tales of murder, suicide or witchcraft associated with them. Even a small piece of ivy still clinging to a log brought into the house for firing could cause consternation. One instance has been recorded in Cambridge of the variegated ivy, which is today so popular a house plant, being considered unlucky. The holder of the belief, a woman born in 1915, did not mind having the ordinary ivy in her home.

Lilac (Syringa vulgaris)

Many Cambridgeshire people consider that misfortune follows the bringing of lilac into the house. Both the purple and white varieties are suspect, although most people who hold the superstition seem to consider the white more unlucky.

Maidenhair Grass (Quaking Grass) (Briza media)

This grass grows freely in damp areas of the Fens. It was an old belief that it grew only in places where a young woman had drowned herself—usually on account of some unhappy love affair—and so it was considered unlucky to bring the grass indoors. In W. H. Barrett's boyhood the old people used to declare that they noticed that maiden-hair grass flourished particularly well wherever a corpse, dragged

¹ The hydrangea was not introduced into this country until 1756.

from the river, had been laid on the bank. He himself noticed, when minding cows as a young boy, that the beasts would never eat or trample on maidenhair grass.

May (Crateaegeus)

May blossom is still considered by many Cambridgeshire people to bring misfortune with it if brought into the house. The red and the white varieties are both suspect.

*Mandrake*¹ (*White Bryony*—*Bryonia dioica*)

The name *mandrake* is still attached in many parts of Cambridgeshire to the white bryony which, until early in this century, was credited with all the powers of the true mandrake. A 60-year-old gardener in Cambridge, asked in 1960 to dig up some bryony roots, said: 'That's mandrake, that is; my old dad would never touch it; said it might scream horribly if you did.'

W. H. Barrett recalls that at the end of the last century the Littleport chemist 'Old Fitch' would pay sixpence a pound for 'mandrake roots', which he guaranteed would make old men strong and put new life into weary women at the price of one shilling a bottle. He remembers, too, that in the Primitive Methodist Chapel at Brandon Creek and in those of other villages in the Littleport area, when the preacher read the thirtieth chapter of Genesis he always omitted the first twenty-four verses, deeming the story of Jacob, Leah and mandrake unfit to be recited in public.

Men and women working in the harvest fields would garland themselves with bryony to keep off flies—the unpleasant smell of the crushed stalks being thought to repel the insects; leaves of the plant were also placed in the privy pits of Fen cottages as a deodorant in hot summer months.

Farmers whose barns and outhouses were overrun by rats would set one of their men on the task of digging up 'mandrake' roots, which were then crushed and put into the rat holes to drive the vermin away.

A bryony root, as does one of the true mandrake, often resembles the trunk, legs and thighs of a human being. W. H. Barrett remembers old Fenmen digging up roots, selecting those most human in shape, washing them carefully and putting on them their marks—few of the older generations could read or write. On their visits to the local inn the men took their roots with them to join others arranged on the taproom mantelshelf ready to be judged in a competition for which each entrant paid a small fee. On Saturday night the landlord's

¹ Plate 4.

wife would be called in to judge the exhibits, a prize being awarded for the root which most resembled the female figure. These 'Venus Nights' were popular with both landlord and customers, because the entrance fees were spent on beer and tobacco.

After the prize had been awarded the winning root stayed on the shelf until it was ousted by a finer specimen. Even then the first one was not discarded, for if it was suspended by a string from the rafters of a sow's sty it was reckoned that more piglets would be produced. When the root was dry and shrivelled it was placed among the savings kept in an old stocking hidden under the mattress as a guarantee that the hoard would increase.

Parsley (Carum Petroselinum)

It is still a widely held Cambridgeshire belief that parsley should be sown at the time of the new moon to ensure a quicker growth of this slow-germinating plant. It is also believed that the herb flourishes best either when sown by the housewife rather than by her husband, or in gardens of homes where she is 'master'.

Fenmen, says W. H. Barrett, believed that parsley should be sown in drills running due north to south, the direction being assured by night-sowing with the guide of the Pole Star and the Plough. They believed, too, that chopped parsley eaten with boiled pigs' brains gave the consumer the gift of absorbing knowledge.

Periwinkles (Vinca minor)

Fen people believed that if a young married couple planted a patch of periwinkles in the garden of their first home their life together would be a happy one.

The periwinkle is one of the flowers held by many Cambridgeshire people to wither quickly if worn as a buttonhole by a young girl of a flirtatious nature or by an unchaste wife. This belief is also still attached to any flower worn as a buttonhole, but more especially to blooms such as the periwinkle which, whoever wears them, are by their nature short-lasting.

Rushes, flowering (Juncus)

The many species of flowering rushes which flourished in the marshy Fens before modern drainage were never brought into the house, because so doing meant that bad news would soon be heard. Moreover, the person who actually took the rushes indoors would die before the year was out.

A crafts shop, opened in Magdalene Street, Cambridge, in 1966,

had for sale in December bunches of dried ornamental rushes of various kinds. A woman, looking at them through the window was overheard to say to her companion: 'They're pretty, but I wouldn't like to buy any, as they're unlucky to have in the house.'

Sow-Thistle, Corn (Sonchus arvensis)

The milky sap of the thistle was, recalls W. H. Barrett, believed in the Fens to be used, mixed with toad spit, by witches for drawing a crooked cross on their bodies to render themselves invisible.

Starwort.¹ Chickweed (Stellaria media)

In W. H. Barrett's youth this plant was grown in pots in Fenland homes in the belief that it brought good luck to the house. If the plant was gathered when the dew was on it, then crushed and applied to the face, it was thought to turn the plainest woman into a beautiful one.

Thorn-Apple (Datura stramonium)

According to old Fen tradition learned by W. H. Barrett in his youth, this plant, which grew more profusely in the region than now, especially on the marshy ground near Ely, was brought to the Fens by the monks of Ely, who bought the original seeds in the market-place in Rome. The seed was reputed to be sacred, having come originally from the Holy Land, where, especially at Golgotha, it was said to reach to a height of 10 feet.

Verbena

In the Cambridgeshire Fens it was thought that if verbena oil was placed in mid-stream and allowed to float downriver it would attract large numbers of eels and thus mark the spot where a drowned body lay. Fenmen used to steep in verbena oil the worms they used as bait; wildfowlers, too, often baited their snares and traps with crushed verbena leaves.

A courting couple would exchange leaves of the plant and keep them carefully in their Bibles. If the leaves remained green, then the love of both the young man and the girl was true; if they turned brown it was a sign that the owner of the discoloured leaves was false. A leaf was often given by a young Fenman to his sweetheart as a token of his love, in accordance with the old rhyme:

A verbena leaf sent to a lover
Carries a message; you need no other.

¹ W. H. Barrett refers to this plant by the name of Starwort.

Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)

It was believed in the Fens that if yarrow flowers were gathered on St Swithin's Day and put into a pillow they would bring happiness to lovers who slept on it. Old people in W. H. Barrett's youth still credited yarrow with the power of averting evil spells; if the plant was strewn on the doorstep, no witch dared enter the house. If this was not done and she did manage to come inside, then protection from her malevolence could be obtained by making her sit on a cushion stuffed with yarrow.

Working near yarrow on a hot day made people almost delirious with its strong scent; this explains why the name 'Yarrow' was often given to men who talked or boasted too much.

*c. Insects and Reptiles**Bees*

It was, and still is, a common practice for Cambridgeshire bee-keepers to make their bees a part of the household by imparting to them the news of such important family events as births, engagements, weddings and, especially, deaths. If this is not done, the bees will either fail to thrive or will forsake the hives. Old bee-keepers believed that bees would not flourish or would forsake their owners if they were the subject of an argument or were spoken of in a fit of temper.

An 80-year-old man said in 1951 that he could remember when his grandmother died at Barrington in 1893 his grandfather tied pieces of black material to all the bee-hives.

'I remember when I was a child,' a Gamlingay woman of 73 said in 1960, 'my brothers and I were told to go out into the garden and bang on my mother's big tin trays with spoons whenever a swarm of bees was flying over; this was to get them to settle with us.'

W. H. Barrett recalls that early in May bee-keepers used to place a large heap of brown sugar near their hives. By evening all the bees would be drunk—'enjoying the bees' feast', it was called. For the next day or two the insects would fight each other madly and if this continued too long then the top of the hive was lifted and the bees were sprinkled with flour. This sobered them so that they settled down to work to prove the truth of the proverb that 'a swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay'.

Butterflies

'To see three white butterflies together is lucky, so my old Grannie used to tell me,' said a 70-year-old man in 1963, 'and her family,

generations of them, had always lived in Cambridge or Trumpington!

Another elderly Cambridge resident, in the same year, said that when she was a girl she was told by her mother: 'If you see a white butterfly you know that a baby or a little child has just died.' This belief, however, she thought might have been brought from Cornwall, where her mother lived until her marriage to a Cambridgeshire man; it has not been recorded elsewhere in the county.

Crickets (Acheta domestica)

To have a cricket or two behind old-fashioned kitchen ranges was thought, by many old Cambridgeshire people, to bring good luck to the house.

'We used to listen to the crickets every evening sixty years ago,' said an old Balsham man in 1959, 'and then one evening we didn't hear them. My father said, "That means George has passed away." George was my uncle; he was living in Leicestershire at the time and we knew he was very ill. Sure enough, a day or so later a letter came from my aunt telling us of Uncle's death.'

Dragonflies

'It's very lucky to see a dragonfly skimming over a pool of water,' according to an elderly Wicken man. 'If ever I do see one I always cross my fingers and wish—I was told to do this when I was a boy.'

Spiders

Many Cambridgeshire people believe that it is unlucky to kill a spider and quote the well-known rhyme:

If you wish to live and thrive
Let a spider run alive.

On no account should the tiny 'money spiders' be killed.

Toads

Many Cambridgeshire people believe still that it is lucky to have a toad in the garden, although the luck may stem only from the usefulness of these reptiles in destroying pests harmful to plants.

Until early in this century, however, many villagers, especially those of the north-east of the county, considered toads unlucky. This was probably because of their association with witches; pet toads were kept by many Cambridgeshire witches as imps or familiars and were said to be used in casting spells. It is interesting to note that the old Fen word for bewitching is *tudding*, which is probably a corruption of *Toading*.

It was a Fenland tradition, says W. H. Barrett, that the large dark brown toads common to the Fens before the region was as effectively drained as it is now were brought over by the Romans, who used them to navigate their vessels across the sea. It was said that if a dagger blade was placed on one of the warts on a toad's back the reptile would turn itself round until the blade pointed due north, thus providing the navigator with a ready-made compass.

W. H. Barrett, in his youth, was told by several old Fenmen that toads gorged themselves in spring on the larvae of glow-worms; by so doing they accumulated in their warts a substance which, when the warts were rubbed with the finger, came to the surface and provided a healing remedy.¹

Vipers

The black viper common to the undrained peat Fens of the past were more feared than the sandy-coloured variety which frequented the surrounding upland. The black reptile, invisible against the dark peaty soil, would rear itself up on the approach of a human being, ready to inflict a bite which could be fatal.

Old Fenmen believed that the black vipers were attracted by the scent of a menstruating woman and so would often make their way into the rough shacks of the Fen dwellers.

It was a Fenland tradition told to W. H. Barrett, that in the Middle Ages vipers were especially numerous around Ely, where they fed on snails which they swallowed whole. The shells eventually passed through the digestive organs in the form of a brown powder known, on account of the sheen upon it, as *Vipers' Gloss*. The monks of Ely would go into the Fens to collect the powder, which they used for polishing the gold and silver altar plate. Even as late as the end of the last century Fenland publicans used the Gloss on their pewter tankards, and even though the powder had an unpleasant odour, which clung to any place in which it was stored, it was sent on the Fen lighters by river to Cambridge, where it was used in the Colleges for burnishing silver.

Fenland witches were reputed to be able to tame vipers and to extract their fangs by some means known only to themselves. The fangs were then preserved in home-made wine, doses of which were sold to unmarried pregnant girls. So powerful was the concoction claimed to be that it was said only a few drops of it were needed to procure an abortion.

Witches' vipers were fed all during the summer on milk so that by

¹ See under *Curing the Sick: Breast Cancer*.

autumn they had a good layer of fat on them. It was said that the witches would slit open the belly, remove the accumulated fat, repair the opening with horsehair and then put the reptiles in a dark cupboard from which they emerged, apparently no worse for the operation, in the following spring. The viper fat was melted down to make an ointment for the cure of ulcers and running sores.

d. Mammals

Cats

Cats were privileged animals in the homes of the Littleport Fens during W. H. Barrett's boyhood. No matter how poor a family was, room and food were always found for at least one cat. So much was the animal a part of the household that it used to accompany its owners to church or chapel on Sunday evenings, waiting outside during the service and then accompanying the family on the ritual evening stroll, often called 'the cat's walk'.

It was because cats so often gave warning of coming floods that they were so popular with Fenland people. For days before the rains came and the dykes and rivers burst their banks, cats would try to sleep upstairs. If prevented from doing so, they would be found in the morning curled up on the top of a cupboard or in any other high place. Their owners trusted their pets' foreknowledge and made suitable preparations to deal with the disaster which inevitably came.

Cats were valued, too, as being able to forecast approaching death. When a person lay seriously ill at home and the family cat refused to stay indoors, then it was certain that the sick person would soon die.

Fishermen relied on cats to tell the whereabouts of fish in the river. It was believed that the animals could, as they sat on the bank, hear a shoal of roach or bream swimming, invisible, far below the surface of the water.

It is a common belief that cats are sensitive to the supernatural and there are many recorded instances of their behaviour in haunted houses. In the 1950s, to quote but one example, the occupants of part of Abbey House¹ in Cambridge, well known to have a ghost, noticed on many occasions that their cat rushed madly from the room, seemingly in fear for no apparent reason. Sometimes it would start out of a deep sleep, fur bristling, mewing piteously and showing obvious signs of distress.

¹ For a history of this house see under *Narratives and Traditions*.

The belief that good luck follows the unexpected sight of a black cat is still held by many Cambridgeshire people. To some people in the county an all-white cat brings good fortune, again if it is seen by chance; to others such a cat is an omen of bad news.

Dogs

The howling of a dog, especially of a hound, at night is still believed by many Cambridgeshire people to foretell a death. The following record was made on January 30th, 1936, by Edward Wilson:¹

This morning my landlady in Bridge Street (Cambridge) came to tell me that Mr C., the chemist, was dead. He had died suddenly during the night. Next door there is a stable in which a hound is kept and I had been woken up about three o'clock this morning by its howling.

'Did you hear that dog howling this morning?' my landlady asked when she brought in my breakfast; well, as soon as I heard that I thought, Oh dear, that means a death. I hope it won't be one of mine. I'm terribly superstitious about anything like that. It would be just about the time he died, too.'

Dogs are also supposed to howl or to show other signs of uneasiness in the presence of ghosts; again this has been recorded by dog-owners living, in the present century, in the Abbey House in Cambridge. On one occasion a dog accompanying a visitor to the house cowered and whimpered when it reached the door of the room in which the ghost has most often been seen. The animal's behaviour could not be explained by the fact that there was another dog living in the house, because on that afternoon it was not there, and the cat was out in the garden.

The East Anglian belief in the apparitions of black dogs known as *Shucky*² *Dogs* or, individually, as *Black Shuck*, was held until the early part of this century in the Fens north of Ely. The noise of rattling chains over the desolate fields on moonless nights announced the invisible presence of these hounds; sometimes the sound of their heavy breathing might be heard. The important thing to do was to take shelter immediately, at home if possible, and to lock and bolt doors and windows so that the fearsome animals, foretelling death or other disaster, could not come near.

W. H. Barrett heard in his youth the story of Shuck, a big black dog whose master was drowned one foggy night when his horse ran down the river bank and plunged into the river half-way between

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² *Shucky*: prob. a corruption of *shaggy*: long-haired.

Littleport and Brandon Creek. Shuck was never seen again, but on pitch-black nights wayfarers could hear him padding along the road whining and howling for his dead master. Some even declared that they had felt the dog's hot breath against their legs, while people living in the houses alongside the road dreaded the dark nights when Shuck's howls kept them awake as he roamed up and down the river bank.

In 1906, however, his existence was abruptly ended. A well-known Littleport resident, motoring home one foggy autumn evening, crashed into some object on the road and stalled his engine. He landed up off the road and with his front wheel only a few feet from the river at the very spot where Shuck's master had been drowned a hundred years before. The animal was never heard again, so this accident must, the local folk declared, have been the first case of a ghost dog being run over and killed by a motor car.

Hares

In many parts of Cambridgeshire a hare running through a village street is taken to be a sign of an outbreak of fire in the near future. In 1956 there was a fire at Fordham and in the *Cambridge Independent Press and Chronicle* of April 6th appeared the following paragraph:

A curious point arises in connection with a fire at Fordham. It is part of the old Cambridgeshire folklore that a fire always follows if a hare runs down the main street of a village. The week before last a hare did run down the main street of Fordham. It was pursued by Mr Richard Nicholls, a septuagenarian, and it was killed in a shed within three yards of the place where this fire broke out.

W. H. Barrett recalls that once, when he was working as a young boy with a shepherd near Littleport he took into the shepherd's hut a leveret¹ he had found. He was at once ordered to take it away and was told that it was very unlucky to allow a live hare to enter a building.

Those old Sallies² out there, said the shepherd, pointing to half a dozen hares running about in the field, are nothing else but witches, planning out some poor old soul's ill luck. The screams they make are just like those which the old women let out when you young devils of boys let mice loose in the chapel, and how you laugh when you hear them. But when you grow up and maybe are a shepherd yourself, you won't laugh at the screams you hear when you're watching a flock of lambing ewes at night, when the witches turn themselves into hares and race each

¹ *Leveret*: a young hare, especially one in its first year. *O.E.D.*

² *Cambs.* name for hares, still in use.

other across the fen, making the old dog cringe and creep up as close to you as he can.

Now, can you tell me of any pub in the Fens called the Hare and Hounds? Of course you can't because a fenman would rather go without his beer than drink a pint in a house with that name. But he wouldn't mind going into one called the Greyhound because he knows that's the only dog that can catch a witch when she's running about like a hare. And do you know why greyhounds hate hares? Well, the Devil tried to breed a dog once to look as much like himself as possible, but he found that all the pups he got walked on four feet instead of two as he did. So he asked a witch to help him. The best she could do was to burn out the insides of the pups' noses so that the animals couldn't run with their noses to the ground to pick up a scent but ran with their heads up so they could see where they were going. That's why greyhounds chase by sight and why the only animals they chase are hares, which we all know are really witches.

That Cambridgeshire witches transformed themselves into hares is recorded in many parts of the county. A Thorney man said in 1956 that his grandmother, who died in 1897 at the age of 90, would never, according to his father, eat jugged hare, because 'she might be eating a witch'. That hares which were, in fact, disguised witches could only be killed by silver shot is a tradition known to several Cambridgeshire people still living, the belief having been learned in most instances from elderly relatives.

Horses

'You should spit and make a wish whenever you see a piebald horse,' said a Swaffham Prior farm worker in 1960, 'but you mustn't say your wish aloud.'

Cambridgeshire people seem to have varying beliefs concerning the white 'stockings' seen on some horses. To see a horse with two white forelegs is said by some to bring good luck; other people say that good fortune follows only on the sight of back and front white 'stockings' on the same side of the animal.

'A horse which has four white stockings is no good,' said the Swaffham Prior man referred to above. 'It doesn't matter if it's a farm horse or a racehorse.'

The gift of being able to control horses, to make them stand motionless despite the efforts of others to make them move, until they were 'released' by the owner of the gift is an interesting part of Cambridgeshire folklore. The person endowed with this power was known as a *Toadman*, and because to qualify as such he had to carry out a secret rite involving a pact with the Devil, he was feared by his neighbours and was himself unwilling to speak of his peculiar gift.

The Toadman had to catch a live toad and either skin it alive or peg it to an ant-heap until the ants had eaten the bones clean. Alternatively the toad could be thrown to the ground with sufficient force to kill it. After either method the bones were carried by the would-be Toadman in his pocket until they were perfectly dry. Then at midnight on a night of full moon he had to go down to a stream and throw in the bones, which were said to scream horribly as he did so. One bone would detach itself from the rest and point or start to move upstream; this one had to be rescued by the Toadman, who now had his magic power. According to one account received in 1949 from a retired horsekeeper of March, the Toadman had to carry the bone to the stables at midnight on three consecutive nights. On the third night the Devil appeared to him and a fight ensued in which the Devil drew his opponent's blood, this action making the latter a fully initiated Toadman.

In 1950 a Comberton woman said that her grandfather had told her that he was a Toadman and had told her something of the bone ritual. According to him the Devil came immediately after the bone was taken from the water. He confessed that he had, as a young man, exercised his power over horses two or three times, after which he was 'too scared' to do it any more.

As well as making horses stand immovable Toadmen could also make the animals so uncontrollable that no one else could manage them; thus they were always sure of employment.

In 1956 the question of Toadmen was discussed at an adult evening class in the county. The members agreed that Toadmen were known to exist in Cambridgeshire between 1918 and 1938; whether their influence over horses was obtained by the use of drugs or herbs or by some supernatural means could not be decided.

Stories of Toadmen are numerous. The following were recorded in 1936 by E. G. Bales¹ from a man living near Wisbech who had been told them sixty years before.

An entire leader² went to a farm³ and when he got there the farmer said his mares were all out at work and he told the man to put his hoss back in the stable and wait till the mares got back. When the hoss wor in the stable the farmer put a spell on it and then went off to work. The chap who owned the hoss couldn't take it away till the farmer took the spell off. He'd put the spell on it, you see, to make the chap stop all day at the farm and not go away without the mares being served.

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² A man who owned a stallion which he took to serve mares on the farms in his neighbourhood.

³ The farm was between Wisbech and Upwell.

Another anecdote told by the same man about the same farmer ran:

In those days they used to take loads of corn into Wisbech. They used to start early so got loaded up overnight. The hossman did the loading and he used to put a bunch of straw on to sell at Wisbech and hev the money for hisself. One morning he went to start off but the hosses wouldn't go. The farmer put his head out of the house window and he say: 'Take that bunch of straw off and then they'll go.' So the hossman took the straw off, chucked it down and sure enough those hosses went. But arter he'd gone a distance down the road he thought he'd suck that old farmer in; so he went back, picked up the straw and threw it on the wagon and told them hosses to pull. They just wouldn't and arter shouting and shouting at them he just had to throw that straw back in the dyke. Of course, if he'd whipped the cart wheel those hosses *would* have gone and then that farmer would have felt the pain hisself.

Finally, to prove that the farmer, who was obviously a Toadman, was on friendly terms with the Devil the man recounted;

I worked for that old farmer. He'd walk hoom at night even when he wor dead drunk. He use to have his old housekeeper walk with him and he used to swear he could see the Devil. 'Can't yew see him, Mary?' he use to say. 'I can'. But she couldn't and she use to call him an old fool.

Women, as well as men, could exercise the same power over horses and generally seem to have done so in order to get their revenge on someone who had annoyed them. There is no record of such women having performed the bone ceremony, and they were usually persons who had attributed to them the reputation of being witches.

In 1936 was recorded¹ the following from a woman at Wisbech:

When my mother wor a young girl there wor an old witch who could stop hosses on the road and wouldn't let them go till she liked. The children wor all scared of her but they'd been told if they could draw blood from her she couldn't hurt them. One day my mother and some other gals met this witch on the road. My mother ran up to her shouting: 'I'm not scared', and she scratched her with a pin. After that they wor'nt never afraid of her.

The following incident, recorded in 1951, occurred at Histon in the first decade of this century.

An old woman in the village was anxiously awaiting one morning the arrival of the carrier's cart from Cambridge with her grocery goods; she had run out of flour and wanted to start baking. To her surprise when the cart came down the street at nine o'clock it did not

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

stop outside her house, but continued on its way, the driver shouting out as he drove past: 'You'll have to wait, missus, I've got a parcel that's wanted early the other side of Cottenham.'

For two hours the woman waited, getting every minute more and more furious at the delay. When the carrier finally delivered her goods she swore at him heartily and slammed the door. The man climbed back on the driving-seat and told the horse to 'get up'. The animal refused to move. The carrier climbed down and went to see if perhaps a stone had lodged in the horse's hoof—but everything seemed well, so he tried again. Once more he met with no success and then he heard the old woman laughing away at him from behind her still closed door. 'You made me wait so my fire's gone down,' she shouted, 'so now you can just wait, too.'

It was not until mid-afternoon that she opened the door, went up to the horse and said: 'All right, you can go now', whereupon the animal immediately set off at a good pace.

Mr Arthur Randell of Friday Bridge, near Wisbech, recalls a curious incident he witnessed there in 1927.¹ Having obtained permission from a local farmer to borrow two horses to fetch from the station, one Sunday morning, an old box wagon which he had bought in order to convert it to a pigsty, Mr Randell made the necessary arrangements with the farmer's second horseman. He did not like to bother the head horsekeeper, who, he knew, always did a Sunday-morning paper round.

The horses were duly brought and hitched to the wagon which railway platelayers had already mounted on rollers, and they pulled it easily for a distance of about twenty yards. Then the head horsekeeper rode up on his bicycle on his way to collect the papers from the station, and he asked what was going on. Told that it was hoped to move the wagon that morning, he remarked that he bet it couldn't be done and rode off. Nor could it be done, for although the horses pulled with all their strength the wagon refused to move any further and it finally had to be left where it was.

On the next day the farmer, learning of what had occurred, advised Mr Randell to ask the head horseman to bring three horses on the following Sunday. This was done, and although only one of the horses brought was hitched to the wagon it pulled it easily to its destination. The farmer told Mr Randell later that the failure of the first attempt was due to the head horseman, who, annoyed at not having been asked in the first place to bring the horses had put a spell on them.

¹ *Fifty Years a Fenman*, 1966.

Several Cambridgeshire people alive today remember from their younger days instances of horsekeepers demonstrating their power over horses. This was usually done by sticking an ordinary garden fork into a heap of straw, hitching to it one or more powerful horses and ordering them to pull. Although the animals tugged and strained with all their great weight the fork always remained in place until their master chose to give the word or sign which gave them the needed strength.

Pigs

Pigs, in the opinion of many Cambridgeshire farmers early in this century and later, should be killed when the moon is waxing to ensure the maximum of meat on the carcass. 'The bacon will shrink when it's cooked if you slaughter when the moon's on the wane,' according to a Thorney smallholder in 1959.

e. Moon and Stars

Many Cambridgeshire people still consider it unlucky to see a new moon for the first time through glass, although few, if any, now go to the length of taking the precautions to avoid doing so which their grandparents, in many instances, took. An elderly Cambridge man recalled in 1958 that when he used to stay with his grandmother in Ely when he was a boy, he remembers being told by her to stand by the open kitchen door to warn her of the appearance of a new moon so that she could join him and see it from the doorstep and not through a window. When *she* was young she had always been told that a new moon should always be greeted with a polite bow or curtsy.

It is still thought that, in order to have good fortune during the coming month, any money one has in the pocket should be turned over on the sight of a new moon. Many gardeners believe that many seeds germinate more quickly if they are sown at the time of a new moon, or at any rate before it has reached its full.

Several Cambridgeshire people have said that to sleep with the moon shining on one's face brings bad dreams.

Two instances have been recorded between 1961 and 1963 of the effect of a full moon on persons suffering from mental illness. In both cases the symptoms of the patient—acute depression in one, restlessness and agitation in the other—were said by other members of the family to become more marked at the time of a full moon.

W. H. Barrett recalls hearing many old Fenmen declare that the group of stars commonly known as the Plough were spirits of dead ploughmen. They also believed that Orion, being a hunter, befriended poachers who had lost their way in a dark wood, by shining more brightly so that they could find their bearings and so reach home in safety. It was thought very lucky, by Fen people of the last century, for a baby to be born when the planet Venus was shining through the bedroom window.

The effect on the people of Brandon Creek, W. H. Barrett remembers, of the appearance of Halley's Comet in 1910 was a terrifying one. The local chapel preacher announced that the comet foretold the approaching destruction of the world by fire—a prophecy which brought crowds of believers along to the services held each evening, while the unconverted drowned their fears in extra beer in the public houses. The general feeling of tension was increased by the arrival in a house-boat one Friday of a party of Jesus College undergraduates who moored near the Ship Inn. They had with them a phonograph and the sound of this at midnight on the first night aroused the whole of Brandon Creek, whose inhabitants were sure that the music, echoing over the water, was announcing their coming doom. The undergraduates, learning of the panic they had caused, added to it on the next night by letting off fireworks, with the result that, on the Sunday morning, the little chapel was more tightly packed than ever. For twenty minutes the preacher painted a highly coloured word picture of what was soon to happen, and then dismissed his congregation without taking the usual collection, saying that money would soon be of no use to anyone.

While his terror-stricken listeners were leaving the chapel the preacher went up to the undergraduates, who had come to the service, and asked where they came from. On learning that they were Jesus men he told them that they must come back into the chapel—he would recall the congregation—and, as men of Jesus, repeat in their own words what he himself had just been trying to say. His flock, he was sure, would heed the words of men from the University and would repent before it was too late.

The men, W. H. Barrett remembers, refused to speak in the chapel, but agreed to do so out in the open. Crowds sat on the grass and for half an hour listened fearfully to the six undergraduates, who, standing on top of the river bank, spoke in turn, each one trying to outdo the speaker before him in the lurid account he gave of what was going to happen when the long tail of the comet finally dropped off and fell to earth. With the exception of a very few who had, over a

drink in the Ship, learned from the undergraduates that what they had said was all a joke, everyone in the district spent the next few nights at their doors and windows, gazing fearfully at the comet, and it was a long time before they became sure that nothing was going to happen.

f. Trees

Cypress (Cupressus sempervirens)

The cypress seen sometimes in churchyards and cemeteries was feared by old-time Cambridgeshire people because it was believed to be the tree under which graveyard ghosts sheltered in bad weather.

Elder (Sambucus nigra)

In Cambridgeshire the elder was associated with witchcraft. Elderly residents of Chrishall recalled in 1958 that because witches were supposed to have a particular liking for the tree it should never be touched, cut, sawn or in any way tampered with after dark. Paradoxically, however, some inhabitants of the same village said that the elder tree afforded protection against lightning and that it was particularly lucky to have a tree growing in or near a farmyard, because it kept away evil spirits and promoted fertility among the stock.

In the Littleport Fens, W. H. Barrett recalls, no labourer in the fields ever dared to fall asleep under an elder, because the leaves were thought to give off a deadly scent which, if inhaled for any length of time, sent the sleeper into a coma from which he would never awaken.

The belief that it was on an elder that Judas Iscariot hanged himself has been recorded in Cambridgeshire, as has also the belief that it was this tree which provided the wood for the Cross of Calvary.

Elm (Ulmus procera)

The common or English elm is feared by many Cambridgeshire countrymen as being treacherous. It can often, without warning and without showing signs of decay, shed a limb and so cause injury or death to anyone standing near. It is thought particularly dangerous to shelter under an elm during a thunderstorm.

Instances have been recorded of the belief that the *wych elm* (*Ulmus glabra*) was the tree most often chosen by witches under which to meet, a belief which has doubtless arisen from the pronunciation of the name and been fostered by the fact that two

villages in Cambridgeshire—Witchford and Witcham—with place-names meaning respectively the ford and the enclosure by the wych elms are now spelt as they are.

A historic elm tree formerly stood in the centre of the village of Melbourn.¹ Tradition has it that it was already old when Queen Elizabeth I passed under it on her way to Cambridge; when Queen Victoria passed through the village in 1843 the horses of her carriage were changed under the tree. It is said, too, that in 1640, when the people of Melbourn refused to pay their contribution of ship money,² the sheriff summoned the villagers to meet him under the village elm. The old trunk of the tree has now gone, but there are three young trees springing from the root.

Hawthorn (Crataegus oxyacantha)

It was a west Cambridgeshire belief that witches made their brooms of hawthorn branches.

Holly (Ilex aquifolium)

Holly was considered in the Fens to provide a protection against witchcraft. It was a Fenland tradition that the Scots who were taken prisoners at Dunbar and brought south to provide forced labour for the draining of the Fens used to stick sprigs of holly round the huts in which they lived in order to protect themselves from witches. Holly hedges surrounding many remote cottages even today were probably planted by their original occupants with the same idea of safeguarding themselves against evil.

A young man, says W. H. Barrett, faced with a long walk home along dark, lonely Fen roads after visiting his sweetheart, would cut a holly stick from a hedge. With that in his hand he felt brave enough to tramp along, secure in the knowledge that no witch would dare to accost him. Coachmen did not like to drive at night unless they had a whip of which the handle was made of holly wood.

Old Fen builders liked to use holly wood for making the external door sills of houses, because they believed that no witch would dare to cross it and so enter the house. W. H. Barrett's grandmother used to quote a saying: 'A bunch of mistletoe brings all things nice; a sprig of holly will keep all nasty things away, for if you want to find a witch then look under an elder tree, never under a holly hedge.'

¹ Plate 6.

² *Ship Money*: an ancient tax levied in time of war on the ports and maritime towns, cities and counties of England to provide ships for the King's service. It was revived by Charles I, with an extended application to inland counties. *O.E.D.*

Monkey Puzzle (Araucaria araucana)

It was an old Fenland belief that if a Monkey Puzzle tree was planted on the edge of a graveyard it would prove an obstacle to the Devil when he tried to hide in the branches to watch a burial. Many elderly Cambridgeshire people believe the tree is an unlucky one.¹

Mulberry (Morus nigra)

The great mulberry tree in Christ's College garden, Cambridge, is traditionally said to have been planted by the poet John Milton, who was a member of the College.

Willow (Salix alba; S. coerulea)

Until early in this century there were hundreds of willow trees in the Fens for each one or two seen today; Willow Drove, Willow Row Farms and similar place-names still surviving bear testimony to the ubiquity of this tree. With the outbreak of the First World War, however, and the development of the aeroplane, a suitable light, strong, durable wood was needed and was found in the Fen willow. In the haste to supply the aeroplane-makers' needs the planting of new willow setts was overlooked and, in the postwar years, the need to use all available land for agriculture caused farmers to begrudge the space for willows and to ignore, especially in the Fens north of Ely, the demands of the buyers of cricket-bat willow.

It was an ancient Fenland tradition, so W. H. Barrett was told, that gibbets were made by the simple method of planting two young willows a few feet apart in the centre of cross-roads. When the trees were firmly rooted the tops would be bent until they met and then grafted firmly one to the other so that there were eventually two trees with but a single top at right-angles to the trunks. From this hung the bodies of malefactors in iron chains and a cage riveted round them by the local blacksmith. The creaking of the chains as the bodies swung in the lightest breeze struck terror in many a Fenman as he passed by at night, and it was probably this use of the willow that gave the tree such a bad reputation.

Few fenmen cared to bring willow wood into the house for firing or to use the sawn-off limbs of the trees for fencing. When the willows were felled for cricket-bat wood it was difficult to get rid of the tops of the trees even as fire kindling for the poorest families. When W. H. Barrett was a boy any willow brought into the house had to be adzed, never sawn, his parents adhering to the old belief that to saw the wood was very unlucky.

¹ cf. belief concerning cacti, p. 47.

In the closing years of the last century a house at Brandon Creek which had been the home of the Barrett family for 250 years was pulled down. The joists and beams were whole trunks of willow and the timber was taken to the builder's yard and cut into beautifully grained boards, rich brown in colour. A newcomer to the district saw them and bought them immediately, ordering them to be taken to the new house—Poppy Lot Hall—which he was having built in Methwold Fen over the county boundary in Norfolk. He intended that they should be sawn into suitable lengths for panelling the walls of his study. An old farmer warned him of the misfortunes which would surely follow the taking of sawn willow into the house, but the new owner scoffed at the superstition.

The panelling, when in position and well polished with linseed oil, so delighted the owner that he boasted of being the only man in the district to have willow panelling, because the local people considered it brought ill luck; but twelve months later he shot himself in the panelled study. This, however, was not the only tragedy to occur in connection with the sawn willow boards. Before the panelling was ready to be placed in position the sawn boards had been stored in an outhouse. One day a tinker broke in and stole six of them to use for flooring the hut which he had set up on a near-by piece of waste ground. After the suicide of the occupant of Poppy Lot Hall the house was sold to a tenant who used it for housing his farm workers and their families. A man, lodging there temporarily and sleeping in the willow-panelled study, forced his way into the tinker's hut one day while the tinker was out on his rounds and battered his wife to death, a crime for which he was later hanged in Norwich.

Yew (Taxus baccata)

The yew trees so often seen growing in old churchyards were feared in many parts of Cambridgeshire because, in addition to their gloomy, somewhat frightening appearance, especially at night, the trees were thought to afford shelter to witches.

g. Water

The self-igniting marsh gas present in the swamps of the undrained Fens of the past appeared on the surface of the water as small, flickering flames. These were known as *Jack o' Lanterns* and were greatly feared. It was believed that a wayfarer at night could be enticed by the flames away from his path to a certain death in the

marsh. If he whistled as he walked along he would encourage the Jack o' Lanterns to appear. The safest thing to do on seeing the little flames was to make for the nearest shelter or, if this was not possible, to lie face-downwards on the path until the lights extinguished themselves.

Many Cambridgeshire villages possessed, and still possess, water *dowers* who, usually with the help of a hazel twig, are able to detect the presence of water far below the surface of the ground. In 1958 the members of Chrishall Women's Institute recorded that their current water *dowler* or *diviner* used a branch of nut hazel, though he could also work successfully with willow or elm or even with a piece of copper wire.

He grasps the forked twig in both hands and, holding the wood at right angles to his body, walks slowly forward. When he approaches water the pointed end of the branch, which is farthest from his body, begins to dip earthwards until, by the time he is actually over a spring, the branch is pointing almost straight down. He feels no bodily discomfort.

W. H. Barrett recalls that there was living near Littleport in the 1890s a woman who could discover not only hidden water but also gravel. She was often consulted by farmers when they wanted to erect new outbuildings and so wished to know the whereabouts, in the soft peat soil, of underlying gravel which would provide a firm foundation for building.

h. Weather Lore

Before diesel engines replaced the old steam railway engines many people living in the centre of Cambridge and on the south side of the City believed that rain was coming when the noise of trains, especially of those being shunted at night, could be plainly heard. The railway station is over a mile from the centre of the City. In connection with this belief it is interesting that in 1890 Professor George Darwin, F.R.S., living in Newnham Grange in Silver Street, complained¹ to the four railway companies then operating in Cambridge of the disturbance caused by the incessant blowing of whistles during night shunting. He held the theory that there was a wind tunnel from the station to Silver Street along which the noise was carried.

It is a widely held Cambridge belief that if the weather is fine for the University May Races, held in early June, then it will certainly

¹ In letters now in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

be wet for the Midsummer Fair, and vice-versa. The weather prevailing during the days of the Fair is also thought to foretell rain or sunshine for the period of Histon Feast, which is held in the first week of July.

Fine for the Fair, wet for the Feast;
Wet for the Fair, fine for the Feast

is a local saying still quoted. It is remarkable how often this is indeed the case.

Members of Chrishall Women's Institute collected in 1958 the following weather lore from residents in the village:

If the rooks fly off straight in the morning you won't need a raincoat that day.

If the rooks 'break-neck', that is twist and turn wildly, you can be sure of rough weather before long.

When rooks scream almost incessantly and keep close to their nests gales are on the way.

When *felfars* (fieldfares)¹ gather close in a tree and all face one way there's cold, rough wind coming.

If the *jacky devils* (swifts)² swoop low over ponds, then storms and thunder are near.

The wild geese were out this morning, so look out for snow.

If you see a yellow frog jump out of wet grass it will be a beautiful day tomorrow no matter how wet it has been today.

If the skylark drops straight down from the sky, then wet weather is ahead; if she hovers and glides it will be fine.

If the anvil in the blacksmith's smithy sweats rain is not far off; the bigger the drops on the anvil the heavier will be the rain.

If, after snow or partial thaw, some snow still remains on headlands and under hedges, more will fall.

If sparrows chatter in the morning, or Langley church bell or clock can be heard, it will rain.

W. H. Barrett remembers the following weather beliefs as current in his youth in the Fens round Littleport:

Swallows flying near the surface of the water, even on a fine day, tell us that rain is on the way.

Fish leaping out of the water foretell heavy rain.

Cats which leave sunny corners to lie in farm buildings tell that rain is on the way.

Hares racing over the Fens to get nearer the uplands let us know that a long spell of heavy rain is coming and that there will be flooding.

Cows grazing near field gates show that they want shelter from the rough weather ahead.

¹ *Turdus pilaris*. ² *Cypselus apus*.

When snakes are active and always on the move it is going to be very hot; but if you see them diving into rat holes or rabbit burrows then a cold, wet spell is near.

When large catches of eels are taken from the river thunder is due; but no roach or bream will be caught.

Mole holes showing no mound of earth above them tell us of a long spell of dry weather ahead.

If the flowers of the speedwell (*Veronica chamaedrys*) close in the morning it will rain before evening.

When rooks fly and wheel quickly high in the air there'll soon be a violent thunderstorm.

Rabbits sit, twitching their ears, facing the direction from which a thunderstorm is coming.

Summer mirages¹ in the Fens promise at least two weeks of good weather.

Rooks huddling together in groups in the harvest fields show that wet weather is coming.

A squeaking axle on a wagon tells of fine days ahead.

A greasy axle which makes no sound in the hub shows that the harvest began wet and will end in rain.

If you tap an iron plough with a hammer and it gives off a dull booming sound, sleet and snow are coming; if you get a ringing sound, then look out for frost and snow.

If the ice on the dykes and river is dark in colour, then there'll be skating for a long time.

When sheep huddle together and all face one way snow is coming from the direction where their backs are pointing.

A horse in a field always stands with his back to the wind and rain.

The weather beliefs common to nearly all parts of Britain are still believed and quoted in Cambridgeshire. These include the belief that a red sky at sunset betokens fine weather; that swifts, house martins or swallows when they fly low show that rain is coming; that fir cones open to show hot weather but close when it is going to rain; that the scarlet pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis*) closes to show that rain is on its way.

The behaviour of animals is still believed by many Cambridge-shire people to predict what kind of weather will prevail during the next twenty-four hours. Many townspeople are convinced that cows lying down in a field foretell rain, and that rain is to be expected when cats sleep with their heads tucked well round between their

¹ *Mirage*: an optical illusion in which images of distant objects become visible by refraction of light. *O.E.D.* S. H. Miller wrote (S. H. Miller and S. B. Skerthcly: *The Fenland Past and Present*, 1878, p. 561) that it was on the peat fens that mirages were most often to be observed and that he had himself, from the battlements of Crowland Abbey, seen 'the whole of the Wash refracted upwards, and traced the black smoke of steamers'. See, also, p. 284 of his book.

paws. In W. H. Barrett's youth Fen people thought that dry weather would prevail for a day or so if a cat's whiskers stood out stiffly; if they drooped, then it was going to rain. If the animal slept stretched out at full length this meant it was going to be warm; if it slept with all four paws tucked under the body it was going to be cold, while gusty, windy weather could be expected when the cat lay with its front paws covering its nose.

Many people believe that pigs, when they rush madly about a field, predict strong winds, and that horses and sheep huddle close together under a tree or hedge when wind, cold or rain is on the way.

The belief that the weather prevailing at the rising of a new moon will continue until full moon or, in some cases until it has waned, is still held. Some Cambridgeshire people believe that it is the weather prevailing when the moon is full which will last throughout its waning. A ring or 'halo' round the moon betokens wet weather.

Thunderstorms

Severe and prolonged thunderstorms were frequent in Cambridgeshire, especially before the Fens were efficiently drained.¹ The large expanses of water such as Soham and Whittlesea Meres, which have now become cultivated land, were said to attract the storms, which followed, it was believed, the course of the main rivers and led, at the convergence of two streams, to the meeting of two separate storms and particularly violent thunder and lightning.

W. H. Barrett recalls that toads acted as predictors of Fen storms, because, on hearing distant thunder, the reptiles would make for the nearest water and burrow in the mud until the storm had passed. Men working out in the fields and seeing toads hurrying towards the dykes were warned by this to take shelter themselves.

He also remembers that Fenland cottage doors at the back and front of the house were usually left open during a storm so that lightning would 'pass through the house' and any thunderbolt which might fall down the chimney would roll out through the doorway!

Fenland blacksmiths declared that iron would not weld if lightning was near, but they always took care to empty their cooling troughs and refill them with water which had fallen during the storm because this rainwater was, they said, the best for tempering metal.

Trees, says W. H. Barrett, if they were struck by lightning in the

¹ Cambridge and villages to the south—Linton, Sawston, etc.—suffer from severe storms. Much damage was caused in May 1967 in Linton and Pampisford and a man was killed as he was cycling along the main road to Babraham.

Fens, were left to rot and fall; they were never used for firewood, as it was believed that disaster would befall anyone who warmed himself at a fire on which burned logs from a lightning-stricken tree.

Many Cambridgeshire housewives took care to cover with a cloth any bright metal object—knives, brass ornaments, etc.—which might, they thought, attract lightning; mirrors, too, were covered or turned to face the wall. Several instances have been recorded in the 1950s and 1960s of Cambridgeshire women who still take these precautions.

The presence of a houseleek¹ plant on the roof of a house is still believed by some Cambridgeshire people to provide an excellent protection against lightning. Between 1951 and 1962 three instances have been recorded of families moving from old or condemned dwellings to new Council houses and carefully taking with them houseleeks to place on the roofs of their new homes.

¹ *Sempervivum tectorum*.

3

Curing the Sick

Abscesses, Boils, etc.

The most popular remedy for abscesses, sores and ulcers recorded from many people in all parts of the county as used until the early years of this century was 'Lily Leaves in Brandy'. The leaves were the petals of the white Madonna Lily (*Lilium candidum*) steeped in the spirit and bound to the affected parts. Most people who have used this remedy on themselves or on others recall its good effects.

W. H. Barrett remembers that at the end of the last century a young man of Littleport Fen developed a chronic abscess in his ankle joint which, for months at a time, prevented him from working. Eventually he was sent to Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge. The surgeons operated and sent him home with a wooden leg strapped to his thigh and his own bent at the knee with the foot sticking out behind. With this contrivance, though often in great pain, he managed to struggle on and do a certain amount of work.

When he was about 38 years old, however, a huge abscess formed in the middle of his back. Again he was sent to Addenbrooke's Hospital, where his case was finally declared to be hopeless. By now things were looking very black, for he was incapable of any work and his sick club money was exhausted. In desperation his wife persuaded her now bedridden husband to send for old Mrs Gooby, the Littleport handywoman, and although he had little faith that she could do anything for him, he finally consented to do so.

The old woman came along every other day, washed the abscesses on his back and ankle and then clapped on poultices made of a thick brown paste which she spread from a jar on to brown paper and heated in the oven. After a month of this treatment the patient was

out of bed and a few weeks later was able to discard his wooden leg and return to work. He died in 1931 at the age of 75. When his wife first saw that the poultices seemed to be curing her husband she asked Mrs Gooby whether, should the abscesses recur at any time, she could herself get some of the brown paste. It was very easy to do so, the handywoman told her, for the ingredients were no more than fresh cow dung and mare's urine.

Several instances have been recorded from people in Cambridgeshire who have learned from elderly relatives of the successful use of cow dung for curing abscesses or infected wounds. The use of poultices made from the leaves of the houseleek (*Sempervivum tectorum*) are similarly known to have effected cures up to eighty or so years ago.

Mrs Gooby and other Fen handywomen whom W. H. Barrett knew in his youth also cured abscesses and, more especially, ulcers on the legs by binding on with linen some pennies which had been steeped in vinegar until they were covered with verdigris.¹ He also recalls that 'Granny' Gray of Littleport, who died in 1898, had a sovereign remedy for boils. This consisted of the tarry deposit left in the chimney by burning peat, rolled into little balls, two of which had to be swallowed three times a day.

Ague

Until the end of the last century, when much of Fenland was still marshy and ill drained, the inhabitants suffered greatly during the winter months from ague, often referred to as *The Bailiff of the Marshes*.² The high temperature accompanying the attacks was reduced and the violent shivering controlled by many of the remedies used to relieve rheumatism (*q.v.*). In addition, great faith was placed in the application or the carrying or wearing of many 'magic' objects. W. H. Barrett can remember old fenmen claiming that scratching the legs with a holly branch was excellent for preventing an attack of ague; so, too, was the wearing of a dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) root tied across the thighs or the smearing of beeswax on the soles of the feet. A dried pig's bladder cut open, smeared with goose fat and worn as a chest protector was also said to ward off ague, while a strip of red flannel worn round the waist was equally effective. Other preventives included the carrying of a dried rat's or pig's tail in the pocket, the wearing round the neck of a bag filled with grated horseradish (*Cochlearia Armoracia*), or round the leg of a garter made

¹ See under *Folklore of Human Life: Pregnancy*.

² A Cambridge woman said on a foggy day in February 1967 that her mother, born in Wicken in 1875, always used to call such a day 'real ague weather'.

from plaited hair from a cow's tail. A small bag made of mouse skins and filled with fuzz-ball¹ dust would, it was claimed, protect anyone who carried it from an attack of ague.

To stop the violent shaking of a limb during an attack a fresh eel skin tied round the trembling limb was effective; so, too, was the application of peat ash moistened with donkey's urine.

Forby in *The Vocabulary of East Anglia* (1830) tells us that Ague Ointment, made with leaves of the elder tree (*Sambucus nigra*) is of great efficacy in curing 'agues of the face'.

The late Dr Charles Lucas of Burwell wrote² in 1930 of meeting an old man in the village who told him that he had not washed his feet for ten years, because if he did wash them he would be sure to have ague. 'When I *do* have the ager,' he told the doctor, 'I fix round my wrist about an ounce of shag³ and I soon get cured.' Throughout the Fens it was believed that washing the feet caused physical strength to diminish.

In 1912 people in and around Thorney were asked to contribute family recipes for inclusion in a booklet⁴ to be sold in aid of Thorney Abbey parish church. A Whittlesey woman sent in a cure for ague:

Take a common sized nutmeg and a piece of alum of equal size and pound them together, and divide it into three powders, to be taken in a little warm beer, tea or spirits and water about an hour before the fit of ague is expected. A second powder often has cured. We think it is better not to take the third powder unless some symptom of return be felt.

Anaemia

The same 'Granny' Gray of Littleport referred to above was also noted, W. H. Barrett recalls, for her anaemia pills, which she sold at a penny for three. She made them of fine iron filings which she swept up from alongside the anvil in the smithy by Littleport Bridge. These she crushed to a fine powder in a mortar, then mixed them with butter and honey, formed the mixture into small balls and finally rolled each one in crushed dandelion root.

Bites of Mad Dogs

Among the papers of the Townley family of Fulbourn Manor, now lodged in the County Record Office in Cambridge, is the following charm against the bite of a mad dog:

¹ *Fuzz-ball*: a popular name of the fungus *Lycoperdon bovista*, puff-ball. *O.E.D.*

² *A Fenman's World*, 1930.

³ *Shag*: a strong tobacco cut into fine shreds. *O.E.D.*

⁴ A copy is preserved in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

the Charme for a madd-dogg is to be wrote upon a piece of Cheese pairing or little rowle of paper & given the doggs bit to eate. that which is wrote on paper we made up in butter. ye words are *Oribus diebus, vivas vives, minas mines a populus quaræ*, the commaes & the dipthong at last must be observed.

The doggerel Latin of this and many other charms is probably a dimly remembered memory of pre-Reformation Church Latin.

A parish register is not the most usual place in which to find written a cure for the bite of a mad dog, but in the second volume, begun in 1715, of the Balsham Register someone has written three such cures, copying them, it seems, from some unnamed eighteenth-century medical book.

The first cure, 'publish'd for the benefit of mankind by a person of note' is composed of strong ale or wine, a handful and a half each of red sage and rice, garlic, two spoonfuls of 'tin and pewter scraped', and an ounce of London or Venice treacle.¹ All these had to be boiled together until reduced in quantity by a half, then poured into bottles and corked. The dose was three spoonfuls morning and evening. The wound itself was to be treated with the application of garlic, rice and salt pounded together.

The second remedy was, the writer states, 'brought from Tarquin by George Cobb of Adderbury in Oxfordshire', and consisted of 24 grains of Cinnabar² and 15 grains of musk³ pounded together and given in rum, brandy or arrack⁴ 'as soon as possibly you can after the bite, and another dose 30 days after, and you may give a third dose 30 days after that, by way of Prevention; but if the person has the symptoms of madness upon him he must take a second dose an hour after the first, and if not quite well may take another 7 or 8 hours after that'.

Lastly the writer has copied out *Doctor Mead's Recipe*, 1791. This involved the opening of a vein in the arm and the taking, fasting, on four successive mornings a dose composed of powdered liverwort⁵ mixed with black pepper. After the patient had swallowed the powder he had to go every day for a month, fasting, into the river or a cold

¹ *Venice Treacle*: in old pharmacy, an electuary composed of many ingredients . . . *O.E.D.*

² *Cinnabar*: the red or crystalline form of mercuric sulphide. *O.E.D.*

³ *Musk*: 1. An odoriferous reddish-brown substance secreted in a gland or sac by the male musk deer. It is used . . . in medicine as a stimulant and anti-spasmodic. 2. A name for plants having a musky odour, esp. the musk plant (*Mimulus moschatus*). *O.E.D.*

⁴ *Arrack*: in Eastern countries any spirituous liquor of native manufacture. *O.E.D.*

⁵ A flowerless plant resembling a moss.

bath, though he did not have to stay in for more than half a minute if the water was very cold. The treatment was then followed by more bathing—three times a week for a fortnight.

Blisters

A Cambridge resident recorded¹ in 1936 that ‘a snail, if made to walk over a blister will take the blister away’.

Blood, to purify

The standard ‘brimstone² and treacle’ as a blood purifier, especially in spring, was a popular Cambridgeshire remedy until well into this century. Young nettle leaves chopped and served as a salad also constituted a widely used spring ‘tonic’, especially in rural areas.

A small notebook from Manea, dated 1822 and containing MS. recipes, many of them with the name of the contributor at the foot, is now in the Cambridge Folk Museum. One of the recipes is titled:

Livigated Antimony:³

A great purifier of the blood.

Take a dram with as much powdered loaf sugar mixed with a little simple syrup in the bowl of a teaspoon once or twice a week washed down with a cup of ground Ivy⁴ tea.

Phlebotomy or blood-letting was considered in the past to be a means of relieving almost all cases of disease or injury. In Haslingfield, until the 1880s, there was a woman who was often called upon to ‘bleed’ a patient, especially in spring in order to purify the blood. She carried out the operation by cutting a vein with a small two-bladed knife, the handle of which is of tortoiseshell. It measures 3 inches in length and is now in the Cambridge Folk Museum.⁵

Cupping-glasses and scarifiers were also used for blood-letting; examples of both of these, used by nineteenth-century Cambridgeshire doctors, are in the Cambridge Folk Museum.⁵ The glass cup was heated, often by means of flax or dried shreds of linen which were ignited. When the cup was hot it was applied to the patient and left on for thirty minutes or so to draw the blood to the part which it covered. Incisions were then made with the scarifier, a metal box in which are fixed a number of small blades worked by springs which adjust the length of the blades, so allowing superficial or deeper

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² *Brimstone*: formerly the common vernacular name for sulphur. *O.E.D.*

³ *Livigated*: a mis-spelling of *levigated*. *To levigate*: to reduce to a fine powder. *O.E.D.*

⁴ *Glechoma hederacea*.

⁵ Plate 7.

incisions to be made. Scarifiers were also used to scratch the skin as a counter-irritant in cases of pleurisy.

Breast Cancer and Sore Breasts

The Manea notebook mentioned above recommends the following as a cure for a sore breast:

- 1 oz of Allum¹ $\frac{1}{2}$ lb Course sugar
- 2 tablespoonfuls of Vinegar
- 2 teaspoonfuls of Salt

simmer all together over slow fire untill it come to salve spread on a fine linen Cloth as large as will cover the Breast continue it on as long as it feels easy when not so remove the Dressings Wash it clean with warm Milk & Water if any holes tent them and spread the plaister.

W. H. Barrett recalls that until the beginning of the present century toads were much used by the handywomen in the Fens north of Ely to cure cancer of the breast. The toads found in this area more commonly in the past than now were dark brown, wart-covered and larger than species found elsewhere. A woman showing the first signs of breast cancer would consult the handywoman, who would at once fetch a toad out from under the water-butt and rub its back until beads of moisture appeared on it. When the whole skin was exuding droplets the reptile was applied to the swollen or sore breast and rubbed over it, backwards and forwards, until its skin was quite dry and its warts had shrunk to small pimples. The exhausted toad was then replaced under the water-butt and the patient would have a plaster of houseleek bandaged on the sore.

Bronchitis

In 1936 Dr Mary Bushell, working at that time in the Children's Clinic in Chesterton, recorded² that a mother brought to her a child suffering from bronchitis. The patient was wearing round her neck a string of blue beads which the mother had put there 'because, you know, that's a good thing for bronchitis'.

Cancer

It was commonly held in Cambridgeshire that the application of the hand of a dead person cured cysts and cancerous growths. The *Peterborough Standard* of 11 March 1899 quoted from the *East Anglian Daily Times*:

¹ A sulphate of aluminium potassium. The meaning is extended to include soda, ammonia, potash, etc.

² Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

Some time ago a man living to the east of the Isle of Ely was suffering apparently from some disease of a cancerous nature. His sufferings were intense and his face and neck terribly swollen. He was discharged from Addenbrooke's Hospital as nothing could be done for him. He appeared on the verge of sinking when a woman said: 'I know what will cure you. You must rub your face and neck with a dead woman's hand.' Soon afterwards the man heard that a woman had died in a village some distance away. He went to the house and implored to be allowed to rub his face and neck with the dead hand. The request was granted and he spent a long time in the operation. He quickly recovered and is now hearty and well.

A 78-year-old Cambridge man in 1961 could remember hearing of this cure from his father, but he said that, so far as he could recall, it did not matter whether the dead hand was that of a man or a woman.

Chilblains

The application of urine to chilblains has been recorded as still in use in Cambridgeshire (by a Waterbeach woman, aged 77) as late as 1964. Many people who remember this old country remedy insist that the urine used must be that first passed in the early morning.

W. H. Barrett was himself cured in 1896 by a refinement of this remedy. During the particularly severe winter of that year he and his brothers were suffering from very severe broken chilblains on the feet. They had just come indoors from running barefoot in the snow—this being a Fen cure for the complaint—when Mrs Gooby, the Littleport handywoman, called at the house. Seeing the condition of the children's feet, the old woman told Mrs Barrett that next day she would bring over a certain cure. Next morning she arrived with a bottle of a somewhat unpleasant-smelling, creamy lotion which she ordered to be spread on linen and bandaged on the chilblains; the bandages were not to be touched or removed for three days. Even on the following morning there was relief from the pain and itching and when the bandages were finally removed the cure was complete. Mrs Barrett, seeing the success of the lotion, gave Mrs Gooby a shilling in return for which the old woman revealed the ingredients: equal parts of beaslings¹ and the last urine passed by a dying person.

Colds, Coughs and Sore Throats

Goose grease smeared on brown paper or a piece of linen and applied to the chest was the universal Cambridgeshire remedy for coughs and 'chesty' colds. Often the greasy linen was kept on children's

¹ Alt. *Beastlings*, *Beastings*: the first milk given by a cow after calving.

chests for the duration of the winter. The use, early in this century, of various patent preventives of coughs and colds, especially for children of school age, has been recorded. These include the wearing of a piece of camphor¹ stitched into a small flannel bag, and patent 'Iodine² Locketts' which were marketed round about the 1920s.

W. H. Barrett recalls an oil made from rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) which when rubbed on the chest was a sure cure for colds and congestion much used on the upland fringes of the Fens, where the plant grew more profusely. The rosemary was plucked in April and May, which were lambing months, and a time when dead ewes were often found lying in the fields. The kidney fat of the ewes was carefully removed, rendered down and pounded to a paste in a mortar together with the flowers and leaves of rosemary. The paste was then simmered to near boiling-point, strained into pots and set aside for use as a hair pomade. The strainings, however, were not wasted. They were placed in shallow tins, covered with water and left in the oven for several days until the water had evaporated. The wet pulp which remained was then placed in a linen bag and left to drip into a bowl placed beneath; the bag was squeezed frequently to get rid of all the moisture. The liquid in the bowl was next put into shallow tins which were placed in the oven and left until all the liquid had disappeared, leaving a camphor-like, brownish sediment. When this had dried to a hard cake it was broken up into small pieces, put into bottles, filling them one-third full, and then linseed or rape oil poured in to fill the bottles to the brim.

In the Manea notebook is this remedy for a cough:

Two ounces of caraway seeds boiled in a quart of water down to a pint, half strain off sweeten with sugar add a glass and half of rum take a wineglass every night going to bed.

For a sore throat the book recommends:

Mix a pennyworth of powdered camphire³ with a wineglass of Brandy, pour a small quantity on a lump of loaf sugar and allow it to dissolve in the mouth repeat it every hour the third or fourth dose generally allows the patient to swallow with ease.

¹ *Camphor*: a whitish crystalline volatile substance distilled from *Camphora officinarum* (*Laurus Camphora*). O.E.D.

² *Iodine*: one of the non-metallic elements belonging to the halogen group. O.E.D. The name is now more familiar in tincture of iodine, used to heal cuts, etc. So far as can now be recalled, the iodine lockets were small metal cases, round or oval, which probably contained no more than cotton wool impregnated with tincture of iodine.

³ *i.e.* Camphor, *v.* above.

The wearing of a black stocking round the neck at night has been recorded from several Cambridgeshire people as a cure for sore throat recommended by their grandparents. In many cases it was stipulated that the stocking must already have been worn for at least a day; a clean one was useless.

Cramp

In the Cambridge Folk Museum is a holed stone,¹ 3 inches in diameter, which a West Wickham woman, until her death in 1910, kept under her bed to prevent attacks of cramp. Other methods of combating cramp recorded in Cambridgeshire include keeping a cork under the pillow to prevent night attacks; keeping several corks strung together at the foot of the bed; carrying corks in the pocket; standing on a cork bath mat. Advertisements issued by Cambridge chemists from *c.* 1890 to *c.* 1912 indicate that the various patent anti-cramp devices then obtainable—metal rings, lockets, etc.—found a steady sale locally. The modern remedy for cramp, often prescribed by doctors, is 5-grain tablets of sulphate of quinine, advertised by commercial firms as ‘Cramp Pills’.

Cuts and Grazes

Sympathetic magic, that is the application of some soothing salve to an object which has caused a wound, scratch or graze, instead of or as well as to the sufferer himself, is still practised in Cambridgeshire today. In 1959 and again in 1963 instances were recorded, one in Cambridge and the other in Barrington from a 65-year-old woman and a 73-year-old man respectively. Both of these people said that whenever they cut, scratched or grazed themselves they always applied some iodine or a patent skin ointment to the wound, but, at the same time, never failed to apply it also to the knife, barbed wire or whatever was the cause of the trouble.

Fen people maintained that a slice of horseradish applied to a cut stopped the bleeding and drew the edges of the skin together quickly so that the minimum of scarring resulted.

Until the latter years of the last century there were still cottages in the Fens which had earth floors over which a layer of sand was laid. Babies, before they could walk, would crawl and hitch themselves over these floors, with the result that their buttocks often became sore with ‘gravel rash’ as it was called. A cure for this, so W. H. Barrett recalls, was the application of mutton fat.

¹ Plate 8.

Throughout the county the use of cobwebs to stop bleeding has been recorded. The latest instance was from a man in Comberton, aged 53, who in 1964 still, if ever he cut himself when working in a barn, stable or cowshed and there was a cobweb handy, applied it at once to the wound. He admitted, though, that on returning home he took the precaution of cleansing the cut and applying a patent germicidal ointment on a bandage. 'My old dad never did that, though,' he said, 'nor his dad neither, and they never come to no harm.'

W. H. Barrett remembers that, in his youth, *Bloodstones* were always carried in the dinner baskets of men working out in lonely fields where reaping hooks, even in skilled hands, could occasionally slip and cause a severe gash or even a severed artery. The bloodstones were then invaluable.

The stones were really multi-coloured glass marbles with a hole in the centre through which a yard of silk cord was threaded with knots tied at intervals along its length to prevent the balls from slipping off. Whenever a deep gash had to be treated quickly the bloodstone was tied tightly round the limb to arrest the bleeding until more skilled help was forthcoming. It was firmly believed in the Fens that every one of Cromwell's soldiers carried a bloodstone and that it was due to them that so simple a life-saver came into Fenland. W. H. Barrett was told that until the 1850s there was in King's Lynn a Flemish glassblower from whose workshop came hundreds of these glass balls.

In 1936 Edward Wilson was told by a 50-year-old Cambridge man that the finest healer for a cut was 'to put pepper on it, bind it up and it will soon be well'.¹

Digestive and Bowel Complaints

W. H. Barrett remembers from his youth at the end of the last century that grated horseradish was highly thought of in the Fens as a cure for colic, as were also the roots of the periwinkle (*Vinea minor* or *Vinea major*). Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) was also a popular remedy for indigestion, especially for that caused by eating home-killed pork which had been kept too long in the brine pot. His grandmother always added finely chopped tansy leaves to her bread dough and cake mixtures to prevent indigestion. Diarrhoea caused by eating tainted food or by drinking the often suspect river water was cured and prevented by acorns grated to a fine powder. This was often served, as is nutmeg, on the top of milk puddings or mixed in

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

the frummit¹ on which babies were often weaned and which very often caused diarrhoea.

The notebook containing recipes gathered from Manea people and others in the neighbourhood contains the following remedy for 'Relaxation of the Bowels':

$\frac{1}{2}$ oz Rhubarb
 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz Ginger
 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz Cinnamon

Mixed in peppermint water if attended with much pain take 15 drops of laudunum² in one of the doses which is one tablespoonful as often as is required.

Aperients recommended in the same book for the relief of constipation are, firstly, for a child from one to two years old:

Powdered Rhubarb 2 grains
do jallop³ 2 grains
do Scamony⁴ 1 grain;

secondly, presumably for an adult in view of the high spirituous content:

2 oz of Rhubarb, 4 oz of Senna $\frac{1}{2}$ oz cardamon⁵ seeds $\frac{1}{2}$ oz Saffron infuse all in a quart of Brandy let them stand in a warm place two or three days when it will be fit for use one Tablespoon for a dose.

Dropsy

W. H. Barrett remembers that a man suffering from such severe dropsy that he could only just waddle about was cured by Mrs Gooby, the Littleport handywoman, after doctors had dismissed his case as hopeless. She recommended that he ate nothing else but bran mash and drank nothing but water in which bran had been steeped. In a few weeks he was completely cured and back at work. A tea infused from dried elder flowers has also been recorded as a Cambridgeshire remedy for dropsy.

¹ *Frummity*, alt. *Furmenty*, *Frumenty*: a dish made of hulled wheat boiled in milk and seasoned with cinnamon, sugar, etc. *O.E.D.*

² *Laudanum*: in early use, any of various preparations in which opium was the main ingredient. Now, the simple alcoholic tincture of opium. *O.E.D.*

³ *Jalop*: a purgative drug obtained from the tuberous roots of a Mexican climbing plant, *Exogonium* (*pomaca*) *Purga*. *O.E.D.* The derivative *jollop* is still often used for any medicine, but especially of purgatives.

⁴ *Scammony*: a kind of Asiatic convulvulus yielding a gum-resin used as a drastic purgative. *O.E.D.*

⁵ *Cardamon*: a spice obtained from seed capsules of E. Indian plants. *O.E.D.*

Earache

A cure recorded in many parts of Cambridgeshire as in use until the beginning of this century was the application of a hot onion to an aching or discharging ear.

Eyes, Care of

Rubbing sore and inflamed eyes with one's own spittle has been recorded from several elderly Cambridgeshire people as an infallible remedy; that it is effective only when done immediately on waking up in the morning is recorded in four instances. It is still believed that a sty can be cured on a married woman's eye if she rubs it with her wedding ring. Many women now in their late sixties and over have said that their ears were pierced in childhood, their mothers believing that this would strengthen the eyes.

Hair, Care of

Rosemary has always been highly prized as a hair tonic and is today still an important ingredient in many patent hair restorers and shampoos. It is also claimed to discourage greying of hair. In the Fens men attached much importance to long hair as a sign of physical strength. Hair cuts were annual¹ or biennial events and until the 1920s it was still not unusual to see men from the remoter Fens with hair reaching to their shoulders. A thick growth of hair on their chests was said to keep out the cold in the days when such hard tasks as dyke digging and cleansing, reed and sedge cutting had to be done by hand. Rosemary Salve, the making of which has been described under the heading *Colds, Coughs and Sore Throats*, was rubbed frequently on the head and chest. The salve was also an effective cure for lice and nits in the hair. Mothers suckling their babies rubbed it on their breasts, believing this would help to stimulate the growth of thick hair in both girls and boys.

The following recipes occur in the Manea notebook, collected by the compiler from friends in Chatteris:

Dry Scurf in the head or ring worms

2 oz Tobacco

1½ oz Pepper

2 oz Black pepper

boil them in three pints of water till reduced to a Quart small quantity at a time every day or two dabbed on the Hd.

¹ Dr C. Lucas, *The Fenman's World*, 1930, recorded that men of Burwell and neighbourhood had their hair cut annually at Reach Fair.

Ring worms in the Head

2 oz Tobacco 2 oz Black Sulphur $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz Pepper boil them in three pints of water till reduced to a Quart take a small quantity and wash the head every day after which annoint the head with an oinment made with $\frac{1}{4}$ lb hogs lard and 1 oz red precipitated powder well braided together a piece the size of a walnut rubbed all over the head after the wash.

Goose grease rubbed into the head to stimulate hair growth and dispel dandruff was used by many Cambridgeshire people until early in this century. Arthur B. Gray, in his *Cambridge Revisited*, published in 1921, recalled that a barber in Green Street used to sell Bear's Grease for use as a hair pomade. To advertise this he kept in the cellar a live bear which was visible to passers-by through the grating covering the area in front of the cellar.

Headache

Bathing the forehead and temples with vinegar or with hot water in which mint or sage (*Salvia officinalis*) has been boiled are headache remedies recorded from Cambridgeshire people. A woman aged 45 in 1962 said that her grandmother believed that soaking the feet in a hot mustard bath gave relief in cases of headache and giddiness—'She always swears that it draws the pain away from the head.'

Writing in 1878, T. F. Thiselton Dyer¹ referred to an old man, called the 'Duke of York', who lived in Cambridge 'some years ago'. He earned his living by sitting on the steps of King's College Chapel and exhibiting live snakes the sloughed-off skins of which he sold as being 'excellent remedies for every kind of pain in the head when bound round the forehead and temples'. There is no record in the College of the snake-seller.

Hernia

A common Cambridgeshire practice until about the 1880s, especially in the south and west of the county, was to pass a child suffering from rupture through a split ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) sapling,² which was then bound tightly at intervals along the split with strong twine. It was believed that as the tree knit together so the hernia would be reduced.

Lumbago

That scourge of the outdoor manual worker—backache and lumbago—needed first and foremost the application of heat to relieve the pain and to loosen the muscles. Ingredients which could be

¹ T. F. Thistleton Dyer: *English Folk-Lore*, 1884, p. 17.

² Plate 9.

applied as poultices and plasters varied in Cambridgeshire from hot linseed, hot nettle (*Urtica dioica*) leaves and pancakes. The use of the latter is recorded by the late Dr Charles Lucas. He wrote in 1930:¹

Fen people would sometimes apply a hot pancake to relieve lumbago or pain in the back, also to help a boil to break, and probably after used to eat the cakes at supper as a savoury. Fenmen were savers in matters of food.

Should no other remedy be at hand heat could be applied by the simple method of ironing with a flat iron over a thick piece of brown paper laid over the patient's back.

In the Littleport Fens, W. H. Barrett recalls, horseradish was grated, soaked in boiling water and used as a poultice. Should blisters result, these were cured by removing the dried poultice, baking it until it was quite dry then crumbling it with some flour and sprinkling the mixture on the back.

Nose Bleeding

The bloodstones used to arrest severe bleeding resulting from deep cuts² were tied by many Fenland mothers round their children's necks in the hope that they would prevent nose bleeding.

In 1911 a Guilden Morden man was shown by a 72-year-old woman in the village a bloodstone of dark green glass inlaid with white and orange wavy lines. She told him that it must be hung on a red silk, preferably twisted silk, with three knots at 3-inch intervals along its length. The 'stone' must, she said, first have some drops of blood put on it before the user placed it round his neck so that it hung between his shoulders next to the skin. Her great-grandfather had bought it for her father when the latter was a lad, to stop nose bleeding, and had paid the very considerable sum of three guineas for it. She herself had worn the bloodstone continuously for six months to prevent her nose from bleeding and had found it very effectual. It had also been lent to neighbours with the same successful result. The last borrower had used it less than ten years before and on leaving the village replaced the glass 'stone' with a necklace of large beads.³

Plugging a bleeding nose with cobwebs was a remedy remembered by several Cambridgeshire people as having been used in their youth fifty or sixty years ago. The old procedure of dropping a key down

¹ *A Fenman's World*, 1930.

² See under *Cuts*.

³ Recorded by Dr J. G. Frazer: *Folklore*, vol. XXIII, No. 3, Sept. 1912.

the patient's back was also popular and is indeed still practised. An 80-year-old resident of March recalled in 1962 that, as a child, the key of the back door was the only one thought to be effective although there were larger keys elsewhere in the house.

In 1931 an old man living in Cambridge showed a silk cord which he had worn round his neck for years as a safeguard against nose bleeding.¹

Piles (Haemorrhoids)

No less than five cures for piles are included in the Manea notebook. The first recommends boiling Scabious (*Scabiosa succisa*) well in water and then letting 'the Party sit over the steem and that will help them'. Another states that 'the herb Pilewort (*Ranunculus Ficaria*) either applied to the place in an ointment or taken inwardly is a proved remedy'. A third reads:

Take as much rosin² finely powdered as will lay on a shilling and stir in a large teacup of thick milk let the patient drink the whole once or twice a day.

Another:

Take a large handfull of red nettles³ and infuse in a quart of white wine in a jug on a hot hearth for one hour let the patient take a wineglass full two or three times a day.

The last remedy is 'For Inward Piles':

Take half an ounce of Black Pitch and boil it in a pint of good Ale till it comes to half a pint then drink it off blood warm. This though a simple remedy has proved very effectual in many cases where other things of much greater expence have proved to be useless.

Rheumatic Complaints

Rheumatism in its various forms is probably the complaint which has produced the greatest number of folk cures and preventives, especially in Cambridgeshire, with its damp cold climate. People born and bred in the county agree that 'it's a bad place for the "screws"'. Even today faith is put in the potato, nutmeg or cork, which, if carried always in the pocket, give relief from pain. In 1959, in a Cambridge bus, a conversation was overheard in which one speaker, having described her husband's suffering and his course of

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² *Resin*: substance in a solid state obtained as a residue after the distillation of oil of turpentine from crude turpentine. *O.E.D.*

³ The writer probably means the Red Hemp Nettle: *Galeopsis angustifolia*.

treatment in the physiotherapy department of Addenbrooke's Hospital, declared:

He went up and down there for weeks and it didn't make a scrap of difference. He drove me mad sitting at home moaning about his shoulder. Then he got talking one day to an old chap who was waiting his turn with him at the hospital and he told Tom to carry a potato in his pocket, and do you know, since he's done that it's done him more good than all those exercises and things they gave him. In fact he's given up going for his treatment and the doctor says he can go back to work on Monday.

The forefeet of a mole carried on one's person were, and still are, believed in as a cure by many people in the county.

Fenland people often suffer acutely from rheumatic complaints, which are aggravated by the cold and damp of the region. In the past, before drainage was as effective as it is now, their sufferings were even worse. The heavy manual labours of peat digging, dyke digging and cleansing by hand, reed and sedge cutting, carried out in appalling climatic conditions, aggravated the disease. Ever constant, too, was the fear of unemployment or of being laid up for long periods with no money coming in save from the sick club of the local benefit society, and even this could be exhausted before the patient was cured. Until early in this century, therefore, the Fenman's one thought was, aching with rheumatism or not, to continue working. So every kind of remedy or preventive was willingly tested.

The universal pain-killer for rheumatism and, indeed, for all muscular and nerve pains, was opium, freely obtainable in the poppy tea which every Fen housewife could make from the white poppies (*Papaver somniferum*) she grew in her garden. She took it herself, gave it to her husband and even to the children, down to the youngest baby with teething troubles. Probably for at least half the year old-time Fenlanders were taking quite large doses of opium which led to their gaining, in the eighteenth century, the reputation for dullness of mind and stunted growth attributed to them by 'foreigners' visiting this remote part of England. Opium pills, in small round boxes and sold at three pills for a penny, were easily obtainable, until early in this century, from stalls on Cambridge and Ely markets, from chemists' shops and from village stalls. Loose opium, too, in small packets, could be purchased to be rolled into pills at home.

A good deal of laudanum, an alcoholic tincture of opium, was drunk in the Fens in the last century to relieve pain, and there can be little doubt that drug addiction was widespread in the region.

Many people can recall the 'quacks' on the markets who, dressed

in a travesty of a University Master of Arts gown, sold bottles of highly coloured medicines and demonstrated the wonders of various 'electric' devices, many of them purporting to be certain cures for rheumatism.

Live spiders¹ were a nineteenth-century remedy for rheumatism, the insects being either eaten by the sufferer or carried alive in a small box, to be replaced by another when it died. A chemist discovered that spiders do indeed contain a fever-reducing substance which was marketed for a time under the name of *Arachnidine*, but most devotees of the spider remedy preferred to carry rather than to swallow their cure.

The willow trees² once so characteristic a feature of the fen landscape provided yet another concoction for relieving rheumatic pains and reducing high temperatures. The willow bark, infused in boiling water, was the early and crude form of the modern acetyl-salicylic acid we know as aspirin. Willow tea, however, was less used from the end of the eighteenth century, when it was replaced by the more easily prepared poppy tea and other remedies.

Until the end of the last century Fenmen and women protected themselves against attacks of rheumatism and allied disorders by wearing garters made from eel skin. W. H. Barrett can recall from his youth the method of preparing them in the Littleport Fens. Only eels caught in the spring provided suitable skins. After the heads and tails had been cut off the skins were removed in one piece and hung up to dry in the sun until they were quite stiff. Then the two ends of each were tied and the skins well greased with fat and rubbed with a round piece of wood until they were pliable again, when the ends were untied and the skins re-stiffened by the insertion of a 'stuffing' of finely chopped thyme and lavender leaves. The skins were next inserted in linen bags which were buried in the peat for the rest of the summer between layers of freshly gathered marsh mint, as the water mint (*Mentha aquatica*) was locally known. This gave a mottled appearance to the garters. In the autumn the skins were dug up and a final polish was given to them, after the removal of the thyme, lavender and mint, with a smooth stone. The garters, called *yorks*, were tied just above the knees, men knotting them on the right, women on the left side. Old women declared that in addition to their use as a cure and preventive of rheumatism the *yorks* stopped mice

¹ Spiders, either eaten alive or carried in the pocket, were also claimed, in the Cambs. Fens in the nineteenth century, to cure ague.

² See *Folklore of Nature: Trees* for the reasons for the disappearance of Fenland willows.

from running above the garters when the wearers of them were working in the harvest fields.

Many Cambridgeshire people still place their faith in a piece of flannel worn round the waist, next to the skin, as a preventive of or cure for rheumatism, some preferring the traditional red-coloured material as being more effective. The copper bracelets which are being sold at the present time are also popular. Several Cambridge shop assistants, when questioned, have said that most purchasers of these bracelets buy them not only for adornment but also in the belief that they will prevent rheumatism.

In the Manca notebook is the following remedy for rheumatic gout:

$\frac{1}{2}$ oz of Gumguacum¹

$\frac{1}{2}$ oz Tincture of Benjoran²

$\frac{1}{2}$ of Oil or spirit of Juniper³ berry

$\frac{1}{4}$ oz Oil of Turpentine

Dose one Teaspoonful in a Wine Glass of Cold water Night and morning.

A 60-year-old Cambridge man said in 1961 that his father always spread soft soap on brown paper and applied this to any part of his body which was affected by rheumatism.

Skin Complaints

Nettle tea was a widely used Cambridgeshire remedy until early in this century for clearing the complexion of both children and adults in early spring. The use of chopped young nettles was also popular for getting rid of pimples or '*pushes*' as older people still often call them. The stings caused by the nettles themselves were relieved by the application of leaves of the common dock. In many country homes a soothing skin ointment was made from the inner bark, leaves and flowers of the elderberry.

Chapped hands, says W. H. Barrett, were cured in the Fens by the application of a salve made from finely pounded parsley mixed with the fat of a roasted hen. Periwinkle (*Vinca major or minor*) soothed urticaria, usually known as nettle rash, while ointment prepared from verbena was considered by many Fen people to be excellent for clearing the complexion.

¹ *i.e.* Gum Guaiacum: 1. A genus of trees and shrubs native to W. Indies and tropical America. 2. A resin obtained from the tree, also the drug made from it. *O.E.D.*

² Prob. Gum benzoin. The Benjamin tree (*Stryax Benzoin*) yields benzoin.

³ *Juniperus communis*. The oil from the berries is used in medicine as a stimulant and a diuretic, also in the manufacture of gin. *O.E.D.*

Teeth, Care of, and Toothache

Faith in the carrying in the pocket of some 'magic' object to relieve the pain of decayed teeth is known to have persisted in Cambridgeshire until early in this century. Rabbits' teeth and bones and the skull of a hedgehog now in the Cambridge Folk Museum were carried for this purpose by a West Wickham and a Horseheath woman respectively until their deaths in c. 1910. Women's Institute members of Chrishall recorded in 1958 that the chewing of an elder twig was thought to relieve toothache.

Edward Wilson recorded¹ in 1936 from a 50-year-old Cambridge man that when the latter lost his first milk tooth he burned it so that he should not have a dog's tooth grow in its place. Many Cambridge people have spoken of the need to burn a child's first tooth when it fell out; the reason generally given is that 'it's lucky to do so'. On the other hand, many mothers kept a child's first tooth, sometimes even having it mounted in a brooch.

Salt and soot were commonly used in the county until early in this century for cleaning teeth. The following recipe for whitening teeth is given in the Manea notebook.

Coals of a burnt vine in powder mixed with Honey make the teeth which are rubbed with it as white as Ivory.

Urinary Disorders

The Manea notebook contains these remedies for bladder troubles:

A flead² mouse dried and beaten into powder and given at a time helps such as cannot hold their water or that have a Diabetes, if you repeat the same three days together.

Dry a Bullocks, sheeps or Goats bladder and heat it into powder and give a dram of it in water or home made wine to such as cannot hold their water and it will help them give it night or morning.

The decoction of the leaves of Plantine³ is a sure remedy for the diseases of the Bladder being drunk night and morning.

Warts

Wart charmers are recorded as working in various Cambridgeshire villages, e.g. Sawston, Over, Sutton until very recently. Some, at Sawston for example, charmed away the warts after the sufferer had handed over some small personal belonging, such as a pencil or a

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² *Flead*: dial. form of flayed, skinned. *O.E.D.*

³ *Plantago major*.

handkerchief, and stated at the same time the number of warts which he had. Others 'bought' them for a penny or halfpenny.

Edward Wilson recorded¹ in 1936 from a 50-year-old Cambridge man that when the latter once had a wart on his hand he was told by an old man to get a grasshopper and put it on the wart. He had done so and the insect had left a liquid on the wart which had immediately shrunk.

A 70-year-old man of Fowlmere said in 1953:

When I was a boy I had warts on the back of my hands and was advised to rub a black snail on them then stick the snail on a thorn and at the new moon I was to point my hand at the moon and blow across it. I did that and the warts went.

A 26-year-old Haddenham woman said in 1958 that she suffered very much from warts as a young girl. She was taken to the late Mr Jackson of Soham, who looked at her warts and said they would be gone in a month. At the same time she followed her grandmother's advice and rubbed the warts with raw meat which she then buried. The warts disappeared in six weeks, but which of the two remedies worked she did not know.

The application to warts of the milky sap of such plants as celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*), corn sow-thistle (*Sonchus arvensis*) or dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) was commonly believed, and by some still is, to be a cure.

The cause of warts is thought by many Cambridgeshire people to be the touching of eggs, some saying that the shell alone is the cause of the trouble, others declaring it to be the raw white. Holding a toad is also thought to cause warts.

W. H. Barrett recalls a belief, widely held in the Littleport Fens area in his youth, that some cows had three full-sized teats and one small one; the last was supposed to be reserved for the fairies and if the cowman drew milk from it then he would have his hand covered with warts. He also remembers hearing a chapel preacher declare that warts were a sign that the possessor of them had been in contact with the Devil and that only a witch could cure them.

Whooping Cough

Instances of Cambridge and Cambridgeshire people, now aged 56 and upwards, who were given a skinned and fried mouse to eat when they were suffering from whooping cough in childhood are numerous. No one questioned seems to remember being cured by the

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

remedy, but most of them recall that the mouse was extremely tasty; 'like fried chicken', many of them say.

Professor K. Jackson learned in 1939 from a Grantchester woman that she was told by her charwoman that a cure for whooping cough was to put the child to run with sheep.¹ Lifting up a child so that it could breathe in a stallion's breath was the remedy known to a Manea woman in 1964 as having been told her by her mother in 1900.

Cure of whooping cough by transference of the disease has been recorded from Mr L. F. Newman. A hair from the child's head, placed between two pieces of bread which were then given to a dog, was thought to ensure the dog taking the cough away. Similarly, to hold the child, as it coughed, head down over a hole in the ground was another known 'cure'.

To breathe in the fumes of the Cambridge Gas Works was thought, until fairly recently, to give relief to a child suffering from whooping cough, and several local residents, now in their fifties and sixties, recall being taken by their mothers to be cured in this way.

Worms

The Manea notebook has this remedy for Worms:

Take the rust of old Iron scift it through a course scive so as to have the rust free from dust then heat it in a bell mettle mortar untill fine enough to pass through a fine lawn scive 15 grains a dose for an adult three mornings together.

Miscellaneous Herbal and Plant Remedies

Arum Lily, wild (Arum masculatum)

In the Fens north of Ely the roots of the wild arum were named *heal all* and it was thought that merely by carrying of a piece of the root in the pocket ensured protection against all human ills.

Blackberry (Rubus fruticosus)

In their Village History compiled in 1958 elderly members of Chrishall Women's Institute recalled the *Blackberry Cure* which seems to have been used for any minor complaint. The sufferer had to find an archway formed by a natural growth of blackberry bramble and crawl under it three times in the same direction on three consecutive mornings at sunrise.

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

Horseradish

In addition to the uses of horseradish described above the plant was of use, W. H. Barrett recalls, to many Fen housewives when their husbands returned from too long a session in the local alehouse. The roots, shredded and infused in hot water, provided a powerful emetic to sober up a drunken man.

Stinging Nettles (Urtica dioica)

Nettle beer was a well-known Cambridgeshire and Fenland remedy for kidney and bladder complaints. Many housewives made their own by boiling the leaves, straining the liquor through muslin and fermenting with brewer's yeast. For flavour, honey or sugar (preferably brown), cloves, ginger root and perhaps lemon peel were added.

In the Fens a patient suffering from smallpox would, to the end of the last century, be rubbed all over with freshly gathered nettle leaves and then with dock leaves. This treatment was supposed to prevent scarring of the skin.

Thorn Apple (Datura stramonium)

This plant, with its thick-skinned thorny fruit, was used, so W. H. Barrett learned from his mother, until about the 1880s as a pain reliever in the Littleport Fens. The top of the fruit in its green stage was cut off, the inside pulped and a teaspoonful of vinegar added. Inhalation of the fumes brought relief. The scent of the bruised thorn apple was so stupefying that it could produce coma in those who inhaled it; because of this effect the plant was known formerly in the Fens as *Sopor*.

White Bryony (Bryonia dioica)

Because of the resemblance of the root to the true mandrake white bryony is still referred to in many parts of Cambridgeshire as mandrake. The various beliefs concerning and non-medical uses of this plant are discussed under *Folklore of Plants and Flowers*. As a remedy the seeds of the plant were, to the beginning of this century, used as a cure for sleeplessness and to relieve pain, while, until c. 1907, mandrake pessaries were used to cure constipation in children and adults.

Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)

Tea made by infusing yarrow leaves was highly thought of in the Littleport and Ely fens as a cure for depression, especially if a little

gin were added, although it was this latter ingredient which was perhaps the more effective. Yarrow tea was a cheap substitute for ordinary tea in poor households.

Cures for Any Disease

The Manea notebook contains a *Cure for Every Disease including Lumbago, Gout and Rheumatism*. It consists of:

$\frac{1}{4}$ oz of Ipecacuhana¹
 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz Rhubarb
 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz Aloes²
 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz Castile soap

Make into 96 pills dose 2 Pills the first time and 1 every Night after.

W. H. Barrett remembers hearing, when a youth, an old Fenman quote the following rhyme:

Make a black cat spit on mutton fat
 Then rub it inside a horse's hat.
 Scrape it off within a week
 Then go outside a toad to seek
 And make it sweat into a pot.
 With wooden spoon mix the lot,
 And you will have a healing balm
 To keep the body free from harm.

Veterinary Remedies

Cattle

In 1933 the well-known authority on the history of the Fens, the late Gordon Fowler, recorded³ from a Burwell farmer a method used by the latter's neighbour in the summer of 1932 to cure a case of cattle abortion. The man built a wood fire in his yard, burned in it the body of the aborted calf and then drove the cow and bull, parents of the calf, several times through the smoke of the fire declaring: 'This will cure the trouble in future.'

Many Cambridgeshire and Fenland farmers believed, until early in this century, that if a cow ate sow thistles (*Sonchus asper*—the Prickly Sow Thistle) she would abort her calf.

Cattle afflicted by lice could, it was believed in the Littleport district, be cured by rubbing the beasts with cut slices of thorn apple.

¹ i.e. *Ipecacuanha*: the root of *Cephaelis I.*, which possesses emetic . . . and purgative properties. *O.E.D.*

² A bitter purgative obtained from the plant *Aloe*.

³ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

Many Cambridgeshire and Fenland farmers held the belief that if cattle grazed in a field where yarrow grew they were more docile than when they were pastured on land where the plant was not growing.

Until early in this century, W. H. Barrett recalls, Fenland farmers had faith in the application of the local sweep's sooty hands to cure milk fever in cows and mares. The man would often be called in to massage the affected animal. A poultice of periwinkle roots applied to a cow's udders was also claimed to be a cure for the same complaint.

Horses

Horse-owners who sent a horse to be sold naturally wished the animal to look in as good condition as possible; working horses not put up for sale also needed to be kept fit. A former horsekeeper of Doddington said in 1955 that when he found any of his animals off-colour and not eating well he used to mix with their feed some chopped leaves of white bryony gathered before the flowers appeared.

A 72-year-old farmer of Toft recalled in 1952 that horsekeepers in that village and in Comberton used to take leaves from a tree—he could not remember the species—which grew in woods belonging to Church Farm, Comberton. The leaves were carefully picked, only the freshest and most unblemished being selected, crushed and then given to horses to improve their condition and make their coats glossy. The 'remedy' was only used on animals which were going to be sold.

Galled¹ horses in the Littleport area were cured by the application of pieces of thorn apple rubbed or bound on the sores.

The breaking in of young horses or the taming of bad-tempered animals was an important task in any horsekeeper's life. The gift of acquiring absolute mastery of any horse has been described elsewhere.² More ordinary means of controlling unruly horses included the rubbing on the animal's nose of a mixture of freshly gathered leaves of rue (*Ruta graveolens*), feverfew (*Chrysanthemum parthenium*) and hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) pounded in a mortar until a fine powder resulted. Many Fenland horsemen, W. H. Barrett recalls, carried in their pockets some aniseed—seeds of the Anise or *Pimpinella*—or, more often, some crushed hemp seed (*Cannabis sativa*), since they found that even the wildest or most timid horse could not resist the smell and would approach anyone who had the seeds about their persons.

¹ Gall: painful swelling, pustule, blister, esp. in horses. *O.E.D.*

² *Folklore of Nature: Horses.*

In 1958 two MS. notebooks which belonged to a Littleport horse-keeper of the end of the last century were presented to the Cambridge Folk Museum. One book, containing remedies for cattle, sheep, pigs and dogs, is almost certainly copied, though with many mis-spellings, from some contemporary or earlier printed book on farriery or agriculture. The second contains only cures for diseases in horses; it is difficult to say with certainty whether all of these are again copies of printed material. In a few instances, however, it would seem that the remedies had been given by some other horsekeeper in the district, because initial letters occur at the end of the recipe. There is, for example, written the following:

for Catching a. young horse get the Wind. side of him and get a pece of Ginger bread sented With some cinnament¹ and fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and rosemerry & sow it under your arm.

J H

To Stop a horse in the Stable get a pece of bay-tree² and Cookoo flowers³ boil them & make ointment of them daub the ointment on the Stable Door

T

Pigs

Many Cambridgeshire pig breeders of the past seem to have attributed any sickness in the animals to witchcraft; even as late as 1950 an elderly smallholder in Longstanton was sure that the unexpected death of one of his pigs was due to the fact that he had had a quarrel with the old woman who lived next door to him.

She's a wicked old devil and I know she did something to that pig of mine to make it die like that, just before Christmas too. But there was nothing I could do about it.

In the last century something could be done about it, so the way to cure an ailing pig, or should one have died, to prevent the loss of which, was to break the spell which had been cast.

In 1936 the following incident was recorded⁴ as having taken place in about the year 1876 at Lake's End near Wisbech:

One of my mates had four pigs and he was going to fatten 'em along of the master's. They was took bad and he had 'em killed and they couldn't find anything wrong with them when they went up to London. My mate had a young sow as well in the yard and she went bad, so we went down to the old woman whose husband could stop horses.⁵ And

¹ Cinnamon. ² *Laurus nobilis*. ³ *Cardamine praetensis*.

⁴ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

⁵ See under *Folklore of Nature: Horses*.

when we were telling her she say to my mate: 'Bor, the best thing you can do is to sharpen a knife and give that old Mrs Reeve two or three chops on the nose and take a piece of grey paper and wipe the blood off and put it on the fire and burn it.' And that sow she got all right and she had three littl'uns in one go. And I know that's the truth I'm telling you.

4

Calendar Customs

Cambridgeshire, though less rich than many other counties in the number and variety of customs observed on fixed dates throughout the year, nevertheless has or had its traditional calendar observances. Many of them died out at the end of the last century; others lingered, though often in an attenuated form, until c. 1914; some still survive.

New Year

In Cambridge, until the First World War, the New Year was heralded by the firing of rockets. At the first stroke of midnight the first rocket was let off inside the open space at the entrance of King's College; it was followed by a second fired immediately after the twelfth stroke. A large crowd assembled to watch the observance of this custom, which was initiated in 1815 by Arthur Deck, chemist, of 9 King's Parade, to celebrate the victory of Waterloo, and continued by members of his family at each New Year.

Plough Monday

The custom of drawing a plough through Cambridgeshire villages with the threat of ploughing up the doorstep of anyone refusing to give money to the ploughmen and boys was continued in many places until early in this century. At Barton the boys collected their money in an old soup ladle.¹ In Fulbourn 'the unemployed dressed up and

¹ Information from members of the Women's Institute, 1956. See also under *University Customs: the Wooden Spoon*.

molly danced.¹ In the evening they were joined by ploughboys with the plough.² In Guilden Morden local farmers gave their ploughmen *largesse*³ for beer on this day.⁴

Haddenham boys and men molly danced on Plough Monday evening to the music of a concertina. They wore fancy costume with *alleggags*⁵ tied round their trousers, and blackened their faces. In the morning the plough had been taken round to the various houses in the village and the ground in front of them ploughed up if the request for money had been refused.

S. P. Widnall,⁶ in his privately printed history of Grantchester, recorded in 1875:

Boys go round the village in a party of 30 or 40, and at each door shout in chorus: 'Pray bestow a ha'penny on the poor plough boy—woa-ho-up', repeated many times with loud cracking of whips.

Some of the young men go 'Ploughmondaying', but they usually go into Cambridge for the day and make the round of the village in the evening. They deck themselves in ribbons and one of their number is dressed as a woman. A fiddler accompanies them and at intervals they stop in the street and dance, one or two going round to beg of passers-by. Only men and boys take part.

At Wimpole a dozen or so labourers used to drag a plough round to all the farms and up to Wimpole Hall. Each man carried a whip, cracking it loudly as he went along. At each front door they would group themselves closely together, then, with a violent cracking of their whips, would shout out:

¹ Cambs. Morris dancers were commonly called Molly dancers; the man dressed as a woman who played an important part in their performance was the *Molly* or the *Bessie*.

² Information from members of the Women's Institute, 1956.

³ *Largesse*: (arch.) 1. Liberal or bountiful bestowal of gifts. 2. A free gift or dole. *O.E.D.*

⁴ Information from members of the Women's Institute, 1957.

⁵ *Alleggags*: cord or string tied round the legs of the dancer's trousers. Mr S. Feast and Mr D. Burkett of Haddenham, who supplied this information in 1958, both used the word, which, they said, was current in their boyhood in the 1890s. It is not recorded in Wright's *Dialect Dictionary* or in Forby's *Vocabulary of E. Anglia*. The *O.E.D.* gives, as obsolete, *alligate*: to tie, or unite.

⁶ Samuel Page Widnall was born in Grantchester in 1827. He carried on his father's business as a nurseryman and had business premises in King's Parade, Cambridge. In 1853 he went to live in the Old Vicarage, Grantchester, where he built a Folly in the garden to resemble a ruined castle. Here he set up a press on which he printed his history of Grantchester, one of Trumpington and a book, *A Gossipping Stroll through the Streets of Cambridge* (1892). He was a keen model-maker—the one he built of Grantchester Mill is in the Cambridge Folk Museum. He died in 1895.

Up with your scrapers
 And down with your doors;
 If you don't give us money
 We will plough no more.¹

An account of Plough Monday in Pampisford was given in 1963 by Mr T. F. Teversham of Sawston, who recalled how the plough was pulled by local farm-hands down the High Street and on to Manor and Home Farms. The 'fool' of the party, dressed in one of his sister's flowered dresses and wearing a wide-brimmed, feather-trimmed hat, danced round the plough, holding out a hat for coppers.

A torn, yellowed and unfortunately undated cutting from a local newspaper came into the possession of the Cambridge Folk Museum in 1963. It reads:

The following verses, written over half a century ago, were brought to light by Mr A. Broom of Cambridge when looking through one of his father's old papers:

MADINGLEY PLOUGH BOYS

Dancing in Cambridge in the Olden Times and in 1861.

'Tis five-and-fifty years ago
 I heard an old man say,
 Eleven pounds his set did part
 When they had paid their way.
 This same man was the Molly then,
 Now wears the ploughing gown.
 This very tale I heard him tell
 This night in Cambridge town.

Chorus:

At Lady Cotton's danced first,²
 As he begins his tales,
 At that same hall where lives a prince,
 Our noble Prince of Wales.³

A new shirt each that lady gave—
 Each box put in a crown;
 From Madingley they made their way
 To dance in Cambridge town.
 In Cambridge town when they arrived
 To dance they did begin,
 Every College they came to
 That night they might dance in.

¹ Recorded, 1958, by members of the Women's Institute in their *Village History*.

² The Cotton family lived at Madingley Hall.

³ Edward VII, when Prince of Wales, stayed at Madingley Hall when he was up at Trinity College.

Chorus:

Then high and low respected those
Who followed the plough trails,
And ask'd them in that hall to dance
Where lives the Prince of Wales.

Six servant maids attended them
With needles and with thread,
And join'd the village ploughing boy
Who finds Old England bread,
To sew their ribbons on again
Should some fall on the ground,
All dressed alike in calico,
As neat as could be found.

Chorus:

Those servant maids all liv'd at farms,
To milk and scour their pails
At Madingley where lives a prince,
Our noble Prince of Wales.

At Master's Lodge they danced at first
And then the College round;
Nor to the station-house¹ must go
If in a College found.
Some tradesmen who live in this town
Call them a worthless set,
And yet they toil the whole year round
In cold or heat or wet.

Chorus:

There's many a ploughboy will get slain,
And many lost in gales
While serving of their country,
Their Queen and Prince of Wales.

In Swaffham Prior, as recorded by Mr R. C. Benstead in 1963, 'we children, thirty-six years ago, used to black our faces and visit the more well-to-do houses, and on arrival we would sing:

A sifting of chaff, a bottle² of hay,
See the poor crows go carrying away,
Squeak by squeak they wag their tails.
Hi nonney! Hi nonney!

'The "Hi" was shouted as loud as we could yell. One farmer would make us come up one by one and present us with a sixpence which, once grasped firmly in the hand, we would turn and run as hard as we

¹ The newspaper cutting is almost illegible here; the line may be *Now* to the station-house . . .

² *Bottle*: a bundle of hay or straw. *O.E.D.*

could, with the farmer's hearty laughter and his huge whip cracking at our heels. I don't remember anyone getting caught by him.'

The carrying round of a miniature plough by local schoolboys with blackened faces was continued in this village until 1929.¹ Members of the Women's Institute recalled in 1958 that 'men dressed as horses'² dragged the plough to various houses until the 1920s. The version of the song given by these members is:

A sifting of chaff and a bottle of hay,
See the poor colts go wagging away.
Squeak, boy, squeak and wag your tail.
Hi ninnany, norny!

In 1920 Miss F. L. Wales compiled a MS. history³ of Great and Little Shelford and recorded that in Little Shelford 'on the first Monday after Twelfth Day the ploughmen, decorated with bunches of ribbon, danced through the streets carrying a plough. The last man was called Bessie and he carried a wooden spoon to collect money . . .' The custom continued until c. 1900.

In some villages Plough Monday, if not observed by the traditional drawing of the plough in more recent years, was at least celebrated by a supper at the local inn for farm workers. In 1937, for example, it was recorded⁴ that in Toft the day would be the occasion that year for the men of the village to go over to Kingston for a supper of salt beef, carrots and potatoes at the Chequers. This was to be followed by a concert of old songs sung to the accompaniment of a pianist from Cambridge.

Plough Witching is the name still remembered in Doddington for the usual Plough Monday celebrations observed there until the early 1900s. In Whittlesford the day was known as *Tiddle-lol Day* from the practice, continued to the 1860s and 1870s, of boys blacking their faces and going round the village asking for gifts. Those too small to walk were carried by their mothers. The procession kept up a continuous chant of 'Tiddle lol, tiddle lol, tiddle lol-lol-lol' as it moved from house to house. In the evening, after dark, the ploughmen visited the homes of local farmers to get largesse, cracking their

¹ Plate 10.

² This statement appeared in the village history which they compiled. Inquiries from other Swaffham Prior people lead to the supposition that some of the ploughmen may have attached horse brasses to themselves; there is no record of horse masks being worn, or of a hobby horse appearing on Plough Monday.

³ A few copies of this history, which she called *Survey of Great and Little Shelford to 1920*, were photographically made. One of these has been used for reference here and elsewhere.

⁴ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

whips and pretending to plough up the doorstep or the garden path if the money was withheld.¹

W. H. Barrett recalls that in his youth in Brandon Creek the old Plough Monday festivities were on the wane. A few lads would drag along an old plough and beg for coppers, but the rough horse-play of earlier times had passed away. It was still the custom, however, in some parts of the Fens for a youth who had worked for a period with his first plough team to be made a ploughman on Plough Monday. The boy undergoing the initiation ceremony would be seized by the older men and, a horse's tail having been lifted, his nose would be rubbed against the vent. He was then entitled to work as third teamsman.²

Until about the middle of the last century, however, as W. H. Barrett learned from old Fenmen, the day was an occasion of much fun and amusement in Brandon Creek. The young men dressed up in fancy costume, some as males with belts and garters of straw, some as women with girdles of horse-chestnuts and garters strung with acorns. Then, to the accompaniment of 'music' made by beating sticks on pails or old tin baths, a plough was dragged round and money demanded. Should any housewife refuse to give a copper or two, then the 'females' of the party took off the long-legged drawers they wore and tied them round the ungenerous woman's neck while everyone chanted:

She has bags and bags of money
And not a chest of drawers;
Once she had a pair but she married a coalman
Who brings the coal in the bags she used to wear.

In the late afternoon the Molly Dancers gathered at the inn where the day's collection was counted and a list of the old women in the district drawn up. After a meal of bread, cheese and ale, the men went along to the village store, where they purchased an assortment of women's drawers into which they stuffed tea, sugar, flour and other groceries with, if funds allowed, a bottle of ginger wine. These were then carried round to the old women, the dancers singing as they went from house to house:

Here we come gathering nuts in May
So the old folk won't feel the cold
On a sharp and frosty morning

¹ Recorded by George Maynard in a MS. account of Whittlesford from the 1880s to c. 1909. Now in the County Record Office, Cambridge.

² The initiation of a ploughboy on Plough Monday by tapping on the toe of his shoe with a stone has been recorded from Toft by Dr R. Wortley.

At each woman's door they handed over the grocery-crammed garment with the greeting: 'Here you are, Granny, here's a share of what the plough turned up.' In the evening there was singing and dancing in the taproom of the local inn.

The MS. notebooks of Cecil Sharpe in Clare College Library, Cambridge, contain a reference, under the date 8 September 1911, to Plough Monday dancing at Littleport.

Jonathan Clingo, aged 85, at Littleport, told me that 6 men called Morris dancers used to go round the village on Plough Monday and the neighbouring villages. One man dressed in women's clothes, led by a man with a long feather sticking straight out of his cap. Also a fiddler and a sweeper with a broom. The 6 men had white shirts with ribbons and scarves all over them and high box hats. In the evening they had a ball to which others came, and all danced very often too a fight to a finish between men representing two different villages. The Morris dancers didn't act a play but simply jiggered about. No bells, no sticks, no handkerchiefs. . . . No plough. . . .

Robert Grinditon (aged 80) at Ely workhouse gave me a few details about Plough Monday which was evidently a regular thing in these parts 20 or 30 years ago. The sweeper they called Humpty. He had a hump on his back, a besom in his hand, his face blackened and a long tail of braided straw hanging down his back. There was also a fiddler and a man with a tambourine. The dancers had ribbons down their sleeves and all down their trousers. . . .

At Little Downham they had 3 dancers and a man-woman who danced and caused much mirth. The man used to 'kiss her and one thing and another'. The sweeper swept children off the dancing ground, and the snow away when there was any.

From villages in the near vicinity of Cambridge: e.g. Girton, Histon, Grantchester, Coton and Madingley, came dancers¹ who, leaving their homes early in the morning, danced their way to the market-place in Cambridge, where they performed to the accompaniment of fiddlers, etc., who wore green sashes over one shoulder and tied at the waist. Each group of dancers had a *Molly* or a *Bessie*—a man dressed as a woman—and two or three ploughmen dragging a plough.²

In a diary kept by a Cambridge resident³ in the last century, and

¹ Plate 11: Cambridge Morris dancers, 1967.

² In John Bowtell's MS. *History of the Town of Cambridge* (Downing Coll. Lib.) is a reference to the Cambridge Plough Monday dancers of the eighteenth century wearing pointed fools' caps.

³ Josiah Chater came to Cambridge from Saffron Walden as an apprentice in 1843, at the age of 16. He spent the rest of his life in the town and some of his descendants are still well-known auditors. Josiah's twenty-volume diary covers the years 1844-83.

which is now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, there are several references to Plough Monday. For example:

12 Jan. 1845. The first thing this morning was the morris dancers it being Plough Monday. They did kick up such a row as I never heard in all my life: all day long: men women and boys.

By the end of the last century and the beginning of this the Plough Monday 'invasion' of Cambridge took place in the late afternoon and early evening, and by then had degenerated into a somewhat rough affair with little organised dancing. Many elderly Cambridge residents can recall being frightened, as children, by noisy groups of black-faced men and youths, often intoxicated, going about the streets demanding money.

Mrs Hannah Gawthrop recalled in 1963, at the age of 82, that in her youth 'Men in muslin dresses, with bows and ribbons, and others with bells on their ankles, would come in from Histon and Girton, dancing outside the public houses. I was once sent supper-less to bed for having danced alongside them from my grandmother's house in Shelley Row¹ to the Cow and Calf, then to the Wheatsheaf and on to the Traveller's Rest on the Huntingdon Road and on as far as Girton Corner . . . At night the men, whom we called Mummers, would come with blackened faces knocking on our doors and singing:

Mump, mump,
If you don't give us a penny
We'll give you a good crump.

Straw Bear Tuesday

At Whittlesey, on the day following Plough Monday, an interesting custom of a 'straw bear' dancing through the streets survived until early in this century. Sir James Frazer in his *Golden Bough* refers to a letter, dated 13 January 1909, received from Professor G. C. Moore Smith of Sheffield University, who wrote:

When I was at Whittlesey yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting a straw bear . . . I had not been at Whittlesey on the day for 40 years and feared the custom had died out. In my boyhood the straw bear was a man completely swathed in straw, led by a string by another, and made to dance in front of people's houses, in return for which money was expected. This always took place on the Tuesday following Plough

¹ Shelley Row runs parallel to Castle Street, Cambridge. The Cow and Calf public house is near the corner of the Row; the other houses named are on the near-by main road to Huntingdon.

Monday. Yesterday the straw bear was a boy and there was no dancing. Otherwise there was no change.

A contributor to *Fenland Notes and Queries*¹ wrote in 1899 that he had just come across a newspaper cutting of 1882 in which was reported:

The custom on Straw Bear Tuesday was for one of the confraternity of the Plough to dress up with straw one of their number as a bear and call him the Straw Bear. He was then taken round the village to entertain by his frantic and clumsy gestures the good folk who had on the previous day subscribed to the rustics' spread of beer, tobacco and beef at which the Bear presided.

The custom does not seem to have survived after c. 1914. The use of the past tense in the newspaper cutting quoted above suggests that the observance of Straw Bear Tuesday may have lapsed for a time in the last century. In 1967 a visitor to Cambridge who, in her childhood in the first decade of this century, sometimes spent holidays with a great-aunt who lived in Whittlesey, recalled hearing from her of the bear. She said her aunt had told her that, in her young days, the straw was carefully selected each year from the best there was available, and that villagers put aside any they had which was suitable, saying, 'That'll do for the Bear.'

St Valentine's Day

That the exchange of Valentine cards on February 14th was widely made in Cambridgeshire from the 1860s is testified by the number of such cards preserved in the Cambridge Folk Museum. The cards are of two kinds: the lace-trimmed ones with sentimental verses and the 'Long Valentines', crude in design and with somewhat impolite verses similar to those which are popular with teenagers today. Many of the sentimental cards have been preserved in the original boxes in which they were sent through the post. It is noticeable that cards were sent not only by men to women but also by women to women, for there are many in the Museum's collection which bear such messages as 'With love to Bessie from Nellie' or 'With fondest love to Hannah from her dear friend Agnes'. There are none which were sent by women to men, unless some of the unsigned ones, not in addressed boxes, were so sent. It is, indeed, a little strange that so many of the cards *were* signed, since it is a tradition that the identity of the sender should not be disclosed.

¹ Vol. IV, p. 228.

A girl whose engagement had been announced could expect to receive, in addition to cards, gifts of a more valuable nature on this day. In the writer's family, for instance, is a remembered instance of one member receiving, in 1895, from the man whom she eventually married, a succession of gifts which were delivered at her house at hourly intervals throughout the day. Among the offerings were a number of cards, bouquets of flowers, lace-edged and embroidered handkerchiefs, and finally, at six o'clock in the evening, a gold watch. Such an expensive gift as the last could not, at that date, have been accepted from a man unless the engagement to him had been announced.

The general pattern of the observance of St Valentine's Day ceremonies differed only slightly from one Cambridgeshire village to another and consisted, generally, of a procession of boys and girls chanting a rhyme and expecting to be rewarded by gifts of money or sweets. The rhyme varied little:

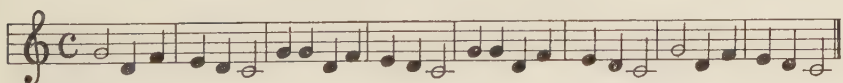
Good morning, Valentine,
Curl your locks as I do mine,
Two before and two behind.
Good morning, Valentine.

In most cases no particular tune seems to have been assigned to the verse; indeed, S. P. Widnall wrote in 1875 in his *History of Grantham* that in this village it was 'sung to a kind of tune, without any pause, at first rather slowly, but gradually getting quicker and quicker and at last, when they are out of breath and can go no faster, it ends in a kind of Jumble'.

At Guilden Morden the practice of girls and boys parading the village singing the Valentine rhyme was continued until 1914. Here a second verse and a tune have been recorded by members of the Women's Institute, the second verse being:

Good morning, Valentine.
There ain't no grapes now on the vine,
But there will be in summer time.
Good morning, Valentine.

The tune:



In the Fens north of Ely eel traps and lines were prepared ready for St Valentine's Day, for it was believed that if the sun shone on February 14th the eels would be on the run before the week ended.

W. H. Barrett recalls that in the many Primitive Methodist chapels which were built in the Fens in the last century it became the custom to begin on St Valentine's Day rehearsals for the Service of Song to be held on Good Friday.

Unmarried Fen girls, he says, wore their stockings inside out on February 14th to ensure getting a husband before the harvest moon rose, while this day was a favoured one for serenading with Rough Music¹ any unpopular persons in the villages.

Shrove Tuesday

No pancake races seem to have been held in Cambridgeshire; in many villages, however, the day was the occasion for a half-holiday for the children.

At Foxton, until *c.* 1890, children used to go round the village on this day carrying a briar or 'bramble bush' which they formed into an arch, dancing through it as in Oranges and Lemons, while they sang:

Figgerty Gutter, come home to supper;
Some lean, some fat,
Some comes under the butcher's hat.

A similar custom was recorded at Whittlesford by Mr G. Maynard in 1905 as having been 'discontinued for many years'. Children met in the Camping Close² to play games, especially 'Pig in the Gutter' or 'Piggerty Gutter'. For days before Shrove Tuesday they had been busy gathering long trails of brambles—locally called *brimbles*—cutting off the thorns. On the day itself they held up the brambles to form an arch through which they danced singing:

Open your eye, open your eye,
Let the King and me come by.

At Quy, too, children carried a long trail of briar round the village as they chanted:

That's fat, that's lean,
That's yellow, that's green,
That's good for butcher's end.

Then two children raised the ends of the briar while the rest danced through. When this was over they walked to meet a similar group of

¹ See under *Marriage*.

² See under *Games, Sports and Pastimes* for a history of camping closes in Cambridgeshire.

children from Bottisham and all of them went round the houses asking for money.¹

In Ickleton, Women's Institute members recalled in 1935, stalls of home-made sweets were formerly set up in the meadow near the Duke of Wellington Inn on Shrove Tuesday, and football was played in the streets. Football was also played at Landbeach² on this day until the end of the eighteenth century. Camping Close was the scene of the game.

Good Friday

Until 1939-40 skipping³ was performed on Good Friday in Cambridge. About ten o'clock in the morning families would make their way to Parker's Piece armed with long ropes (usually clothes lines) and packets of food and drink. Until early in the evening the skipping went on, the men traditionally turning the ropes and the women jumping, although this close observance of the ancient fertility rite was not always strictly followed, because children often skipped with the adults. Tradesmen selling sweets, ice-creams, toys, lemonade, etc., set up stalls⁴ along Parkside. The outbreak of the Second World War brought the custom to an end, although a few people were seen skipping in 1940 and 1941. A lone stallholder, selling balloons, paper windmills and gaily-coloured little paper balls attached to long lengths of elastic, continued until 1942 to appear on the corner of Parkside and Gonville Place. It was this stallholder who told Dr Russell Wortley of Cambridge that, in the 1880s and 1890s men used to come from the near-by Prince Regent, Oak and Carlton public houses and play Bat and Trap⁵ on Parker's Piece on Good Friday.

An 80-year-old woman of Linton recalled, in the 1930s, that in her youth the villagers of Linton and Hadstock used to skip on Good Friday to Bartlow Hills to join in the fun of the fair held there.⁶

At Abington, it was recorded by Women's Institute members in 1959, farm labourers were given a holiday on Good Friday on the understanding that they attended church in the morning. They all wore white violets in their buttonholes.

¹ Recalled, 1957, by members of the Women's Institute.

² The churchwardens' accounts of Landbeach contain records of payments of 2s. 6d. made by the Rector in the eighteenth century 'to the football men' on Shrove Tuesday.

³ Plate 12.

⁴ Plate 13.

⁵ See under *Games, Sports and Pastimes* for a description of this game.

⁶ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

Hot cross buns¹ were, until early in this century, baked at night and sold early in the morning by boys who walked through the streets of Cambridge and elsewhere chanting their traditional cry of 'Hot cross buns'. Mrs Hannah Gawthrop, aged 82, recalled in 1964 the chant of the bun-sellers in the Castle End district of Cambridge in her childhood:

Hot Cross Buns,
Full of sugar,
Full of butter,
Full of little plums.

W. H. Barrett's grandmother, of Brandon Creek, although a strict Primitive Methodist, always marked with a cross the top of one of the loaves she baked on Good Friday, Friday being her usual baking day. This loaf would be kept in a tin for twelve months in the belief that it would protect the family from want and hunger. On each Easter Sunday the loaf baked the preceding year was moistened with water, re-baked and eaten at tea-time. It was considered a privilege to be invited to share it and the person who received the slice bearing the arms of the cross could look forward to a year of prosperity. After tea the two end pieces of the loaf, which bore no part of the cross, were taken down to the river and thrown in to protect the neighbourhood from floods and storms during the next twelve months.

The belief that bread baked on Good Friday could not go mouldy, and that, when grated and eaten, it was an effective remedy for indigestion, was widely held in Cambridgeshire. In the Cambridge Folk Museum is a small cottage loaf baked at West Wrattling in 1919². Although now as hard as a brick, it certainly bears no signs of mould upon it.

Easter

The celebration of Easter by any folk ceremony or custom seems lacking in Cambridgeshire. It is still thought, especially by elderly people, that the day should be marked by the wearing of a new hat, dress or coat.

Easter Monday

In Cambridge, from c. 1900 until 1910, it was the custom for the regular customers of the public houses within easy reach of Mid-

¹ Hot cross buns are still given away each Good Friday to customers at the Bun Shop public house in Downing Street, Cambridge, a custom begun in c. 1906.

² Plate 14.

summer Common to play Bat and Trap on Easter Monday near the lock-keeper's house by Chesterton Road Bridge. Barrels of beer were taken down to refresh the players.

St Mark's Eve—April 24th-25th

Forby, in his *Vocabulary of East Anglia* (1830), refers to the East Anglian belief that the apparitions of persons who will die or have a serious illness within the next twelve months walk into their parish church at midnight on St Mark's Eve. Those who are to die remain in the building, but those who are to recover stay inside only for a time proportionate to the length of their sickness. That this belief, or one closely approaching it, was held in Whittlesford early in the last century is evidenced by a practical joke played there in 1812 by some of the villagers. Knowing that four or five of their friends were going to watch in the church to see if any ghosts appeared, the jokers hid there in advance and greeted the watchers with hollow groans, bell ringing, moans and other weird noises. Robert Maynard wrote in 1826, at the age of 12, a long poem¹ describing the incident, from which the following extracts are taken:

The legend some in faith receive,
Though most folks now the truth deny,
That from the Church on St Mark's Eve
Issue the ghosts of those to die

Within the following year, and they
Ramble the churchyard till they've found
Their future graves, where down they lay
Themselves, and vanish underground.

And likewise those who will be wed
In ghostly pairs emerge; and so
Such as dare watch the door, 'tis said,
Their neighbours' destiny may know.

At Whittlesford, some time ago,
When Rumbell was the Parish Clerk,
Some worthies were resolved to know
If this was true about St Mark.

.

¹ In the possession of Mr J. Maynard of Whittlesford.

Accordingly at night they went
 And safely reached the Gothic door,
 And sat down in the porch, intent
 The wondrous mystery to explore.

.

The clock struck twelve, pat went their hearts
 Till the last stroke had died away.
 When hark! a noise, and up one starts
 Who fain would then have run away.

.

Silent they sat; the noise increased.
 A pew door banged, dong went a bell.
 Dong! Dong! again and then it ceased.
 'It was some spirit's funeral knell.'

Hark! Now there's singing in the place;
 They heard the notes distinct and clear.
 They stared their leader in the face
 And sat nigh petrified with fear.

Tramp, tramp, again the footsteps went
 And nearer now approached the door;
 Their courage now was well-nigh spent,
 Each tramp was nearer than before.

At length the door was seen to shake,
 Its lusty hinges seen to creak;
 The party now began to quake,
 But none presumed to run or speak.

Wider and wider ope'd the door;
 They, undetermined what to do,
 Till Cromwell's courage now being o'er
 Whispered: 'I think we'd better go.'

No sooner had the Captain spoke
 Than off in fearful haste they sped,
 Nor turned to cast one curious look
 To see who'd die or who'd be wed.

Then one lay sprawling on a tomb,
 For now the moon with-held her light,
 Another here among the gloom
 Had well-nigh lost his wits with fright.

A third, too hasty in his flight,
 Nor heeding how he ran to save

Himself from some hob-goblin sprite,
Fell headlong in a new-made grave.

.

And the brave crew of watchers had
The brunt of many a joke to bear
From rustics who were but too glad
To taunt them with that night of fear.

May 1st

At Melbourn, it was recorded by Women's Institute members in 1958, children went out early on May Day and gathered *peagles*¹ with which to decorate themselves. A maypole was erected on the Green and hawthorn boughs were hung on house doors. A procession of dancers, headed by *Jack in the Green*, the local sweep, who walked in a framework of boughs, made their way through the village to the Maypole. May Day was the traditional holiday for chimney sweeps, who, until the last century, wearing their top-hats, took an important part in old May Day festivities.

At Foxton, May 1st was last observed early in this century by 'Hoppity' Flack, who walked over from Fowlmere carrying sprigs of may which he gave in return for a glass of ale. As he handed over the sprigs he recited:

It be but a sprout
But 'tis well budded out,
And at your door it shall stay.²

In many Cambridgeshire villages girls carried prettily dressed dolls on May Day, showing them to people in return for money or sweets. This *May-Dolling* was continued in Swaffham Prior until c. 1960, but the collection of money was forbidden. A few of the doll-carriers in this village were, in 1950, still singing the song:

Sing a song of May-time,
Sing a song of Spring.
Flowers are in their beauty,
Birds are on the wing.
May time, play time,
God has given us May time;
Thank him for His gifts of love,
Sing a song of Spring.³

¹ Alt. *paigles*: cowslips (*Primula veris*).

² Recalled by members of the Women's Institute.

³ *ibid.*

At Over young men picked bunches of may and pushed them through the windows of young girls in the village, singing:

Arise, arise, my pretty fair maid,
And take your may bush in,
For in the morn it may be gone
And you will say I brought you none.

At Lolworth, until *c.* 1914, a basket of dolls was taken round the village by children after school ended. Then two lines of rope, decorated with ribbons, were suspended from trees and balls thrown over them. The Vicar's wife used to give each girl a yard of hair ribbon.¹

The preparation of a special May Doll was a feature of several village May Day celebrations. At Toft an old lady recalled in 1937 how two hoops were bent over, a doll was placed inside and then the 'cage' and doll were covered with a white cloth. A rope was stretched over the road from one tree to another and the hoops containing the doll were suspended from it. On May Day morning the village girls gathered at the spot and when anyone passed by the rope was lowered and money requested for the showing of the doll. As the white cloth was removed the children chanted;

Please to remember the garland;
This is the first of May.²

A similar ceremony was carried out in Hildersham, where, until the end of the First World War, the doll was formed of 'Mrs Jordan's wire skirt frame covered and dressed as a doll with Miss Goodwin's ribbons. Field and garden flowers were made into a garland.' The song which the children sang at the uncovering of the doll was:

Come to see our new garland so green and so gay,
'Tis the first fruits of Spring and the glory of May.
See the cowslips and daisies and the hawthorn so neat,
Together are fragrant and together are sweet.
But yet there's no garland that we may entwine
As the garland of virtue and the fading [*sic*] divine.

The first of May is garland day,
So please remember the garland.
We only come but once a year
So please remember the garland.³

¹ Information received in 1966 from Mrs Tofts, who was born in Lolworth in 1902.

² E. Counties Folklore Soc.

³ Information from Mrs Drayson, 1955.

These May Day songs,¹ recalled in the present century and in many instances occurring in primary school song books, are obviously late replacements of earlier lost traditional rhymes.

At Harston, it was recorded in 1935 by members of the Women's Institute, elderly residents of the village could dimly remember May Day being referred to as 'Sweep's Holiday' and the dancing on the Green and in the village street of *Jack in the Green* or the *May Man*. As at Melbourn, he was covered in green branches and wore bells on his legs; with him danced *Moll* or *Morris Molly*, a man dressed as a woman.

W. K. Clay in his *History of Waterbeach*,² published in 1895, records a description of May Day in the village given to him by an inhabitant in 1820:

Our May Day was our grandest holiday. Preparatory to its celebration the young men collected materials to form a garland; they consisted of ribands, flowers and silver spoons, with a silver tankard to suspend in the centre . . . Our young men, early in the morning, or rather, late at night, went into the fields to collect the emblems of their esteem or disapprobation; then woe betide the girl of loose habits, the slattern and the scold; for while the young woman who had been foremost in the dance, and whose amiable manners had entitled her to our esteem, had a large branch or tree of whitethorn³ planted by her cottage door, the girl of loose manners had a blackthorn⁴ planted by hers; the slattern had an elder tree planted by hers; and the scold a bunch of nettles tied to the latch of her cottage door.

The young men then went for the garland and suspended it with a rope in the centre of the street between two opposite chimneys; this was always done before the rising of the sun; the morning was then ushered in with the ringing of the village bells. We then attended to our domestic concerns till the after part of the day. Our sports then began; they consisted of dancing, playing at ball and every kind of sport we could devise . . .

In 1936 a Linton resident, then aged 88, recalled that when she was a young girl little girls went from door to door early on May Day with flowers. Later in the day the young of both sexes from Hadstock danced from there to Linton, on to Bartlow, and then back to Hadstock by a different route—six miles in all. They danced in pairs,

¹ May songs were sung at night on the eve of May Day as well as early on May 1st. An 84-year-old Cambridge woman recalled in 1960 that her mother, born in Rampton, used to speak of the 'Midnight Mayers' who went round the village singing.

² Camb. Antiq. Soc. Proc. VI.

³ *Prunus spinosa*: the sloe.

⁴ The common hawthorn, *Crataegus oxyacantha*.

holding hands. The first pair held up their hands, as in Oranges and Lemons, and the next ran under singing:

Piggety Gutter, Piggety Gutter,
Call the hogs to supper;
Some are fat and some are lean
And some go to the butcher's s'e'en.¹

Many schools chose or, in primary schools, still choose a May Queen and her attendants. At the former Eden Street Higher Grade Girls' School in Cambridge, which was later the Central School and is now the Girls' Grammar School, this practice continued until 1943, after which the position of May Queen was replaced by that of Head Girl of the school.

In several Cambridgeshire villages old place-names recall that, in former times, Maypoles were set up on May Day. In Hildersham, for example, stood a conical mound, removed in 1852, which was called locally *Maypole Hill*.² In Little Shelford older residents still, in 1920, referred to going through the allotments, first made in 1880 on former open ground, towards Obelisk Hill, as *going up the Maypole*.³

W. H. Barrett recalls that in the Fens round Ely and Littleport it was believed, until the end of the last century, that anyone who was out early on May Day morning would see the ghosts of all those who had been drowned in the Fen rivers and dykes. Lightermen working on the barges which carried goods between King's Lynn and Cambridge were highly superstitious, despite their reputation for rough behaviour. On May Day they always kept their boats tied up, probably because of this belief concerning the ghosts of the drowned.

Fen housewives liked to gather dandelions for wine-making on May 1st, as these were thought to make the best wine; the flowers were also given to children to smell on this day to inhibit bed-wetting for the next twelve months. Women allowed the peat fire which had been burning all winter in the parlour or 'best room' to go out on May Day. The hearth was then freshly whitened and the room kept closed all summer except for some such event as a wedding, a funeral or when the chapel preacher came to tea.

In the Fenland inns, to the beginning of this century, May Day was recognised as the day on which labourers could renew their

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc. The Piggety Gutter rhyme and dance closely resemble the Shrove Tuesday celebrations (*q.v.*). The informant may have confused the two.

² In a lecture delivered in 1923 by the late Dr W. Palmer of Linton and subsequently printed in pamphlet form by the *Cambridge Chronicle*.

³ F. Wale: *Survey of Great and Little Shelford to 1920*.

credit with the landlord; with haymaking and harvest to look forward to the men could expect to earn steady money. The slates, therefore, on which their drinking debts were recorded and which had been kept hidden by landlords all winter, were brought out again and hung on the taproom door.

W. H. Barrett also remembers the children of Brandon Creek and neighbourhood playing the game of *Honey Pots* on May Day. Boys and girls squatted on their haunches in a large circle, hands clasped under their knees. Then all the players began to edge towards the centre of the circle until there was a screaming, struggling mass of children trying to clamber over one another so that the winner could finally stand on top and shout that he, or she, was 'King' or 'Queen' of the May. Early in this century girls were firmly forbidden by their mothers to take part in the game, which had such disastrous effects on their clothes and which, moreover, led to an unseemly display of their underwear.

Since c. 1960 some of the members of the Choir of Sidney Sussex College in Cambridge have ascended the 65-feet tower to sing early in the morning of May Day. There are no attendant festivities such as the breakfast parties on the river which form part of the May Morning singing at Oxford on the tower of Magdalen College; indeed, most Cambridge people are unaware of the Sidney Sussex custom. In 1967 eleven members of the Choir, wearing dinner jackets, sang, for an hour, not only hymns but madrigals, which included *Sumer is icumen in*; *Now is the month of May* and *My bonny lass she smileth*.

Rogation-Tide

Members of Barton Women's Institute recalled in 1958 that a united service was held, earlier in the century, in the village on one of the Rogation Days. The congregation assembled in the church and then, singing the Litany, followed the robed choir in procession to one of the local farms, where a service was held in a field, the Baptist minister usually giving the address.

Ascension Day (Holy Thursday)

The custom, which is still observed, of the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, ascending the tower to sing at mid-morning on Ascension Day is of comparatively recent date.¹

¹ Plate 15. The custom was introduced at St John's College in 1904 by Dr Rootham, for many years Organist and Master of the Chapel Choir.

At Linton in the last century a choral service was held at night on the summit of the church tower. In 1893 lanterns and fairy lamps¹ illuminated the tower, while a tall cross, outlined with multi-coloured lamps, could be seen from far away.² From the closing years of the century the service was held in the afternoon.

The accounts kept by the churchwardens of many Cambridge-shire parishes show that, until the enclosure of the common fields early in the last century, the traditional *Perambulation* or *Beating of the Bounds* of the parish was performed on Holy Thursday, by which name Ascension Day was more commonly known in the past than now. The clergy, choir and parishioners went in procession round the parish, halting at certain vital landmarks for the Epistle of the day to be read. To impress upon the younger generation the position of some of the landmarks—a stone, a tree or some other natural object—choir boys were given a beating or were ‘bumped’ on a stone landmark. At Meldreth it was the ‘town children’—those brought up at the expense of the parish—who received this treatment. They did not go unrewarded, however, because beer, bread, beef, mutton, etc., were provided as refreshments, as parish accounts reveal, after the *Perambulation*. Sticks or wands were often provided for the choir boys to tap on or against important landmarks.

In Cambridge the ceremony continued well into the last century, being often referred to as ‘The Processioning’. Reference to its observance in the parish of St Andrew the Great occur in diaries kept by two Cambridge sisters in the 1830s and 1840s which are now in the Cambridge Folk Museum. For example: ‘Thursday 28 May, 1840. Holy Thursday. St. Andrew’s Processioning Day respecting the Boundary of the parish.’ An old lady living in the Castle End district of Cambridge who died in 1960, aged nearly 90, said in 1950 that she could just remember what was, she thought, probably the last beating of the bounds of St Giles’ parish which she was taken, as a small child, to watch. She recalled that the Vicar, Canon Slater, and the churchwardens had to go through the house occupied by a butcher, locally known as ‘Porky’ Evans, in Evans’ Passage which used to lead from Castle Street to St Peter’s Street. To enter the house so as correctly to mark the parish boundary, the Vicar and the rest of the procession had to climb through a ground-floor window.

¹ These were bulbous-sided jars, about 4 in. high, of thick amber, red, green or blue faceted glass. They were rimmed at the neck to allow a string to be tied round so that the lamps could be hung from trees, strung across buildings, etc.

² W. R. Brown: *Cambridgeshire Cameos*, No. IX. Privately printed, 1897–8.

Empire Day—May 24th

Until recent years this day, now replaced by Commonwealth Day, was marked in almost every school in Cambridgeshire by special services, the singing of patriotic songs, the acting of plays and pageants or by some other celebration. Often a half-holiday was given to the children, a custom which gave rise to the popular jingle:

The twenty-fourth of May,
The Queen's birthday;
If you don't give us a holiday
We'll all run away.

In Lolworth, a 64-year-old woman recalled in 1966, the school-children marched in procession, singing songs and bearing flags, from the village to Huntingdon Road. There oranges were distributed to them.

Whitsun

Members of Whaddon Women's Institute could still remember in 1958, for record in their Village History, that a special Whitsun Song was sung in the last century by men who used to place a twig of oak on each house as they went along. After doing the round of the village it was usual for the singers to walk to Orwell by way of the King's Bridge, and perform there. Their costume consisted of knee stockings, breeches and coats decorated with rosettes and ribbons. The Song has been recorded for the B.B.C. Archives Department by the late Mr R. T. Conings of Whaddon:

Now Whitsuntide is come,
You well do know.
Come, serve the Lord we must before we go;
Come, serve Him truly with all your mind and heart,
And then from Heaven your soul shall never part.

How do we know how long we have to live?
For when we die, oh then what would we give
For being sure of having our resting place
Once we have run our wretched, sinful race.

Come, all those little children,
All in the streets we do meet,
All in their pastimes so even and complete.
For you may hear them lie, both curse and swear,
Before they do know one word of any prayer.

Both young and old, both rich and poor give ear,
 Don't allow your children to lie, nor curse nor swear.
 Pray do not allow them to keep ill company,
 For that will surely bring them to shame and misery.

Down in the gardens where flowers grow rank,
 Down on your knees, unto the Lord give thanks,
 Down on your knees and pray both night and day,
 Pray unto the Lord that He will lead you the right way.
 Pray unto the Lord that angels He will bring,
 And then in Heaven your soul will sit and sing.

Now we have brought you this royal branch of oak,
 God bless our King and Queen and all the royal folk,
 God bless our King and Queen and all this world beside,
 Then the Lord will send us all a merry Whitsuntide.

The daughter of the last performer of the Whitsun Song recalls that 'Victoria' was sung for 'King and Queen' in the last verse. The comparatively modern verses may have been a replacement of earlier ones; the giving of sprigs of oak suggest that this ceremony may, indeed, have been earlier carried out on May 29th, *Oak Apple Day*,¹ and then transferred to Whitsun.

A Little Shelford inhabitant supplied, in 1916, to Miss F. L. Wale, who was compiling a manuscript account of the village, the information that she used to attend a school in Shelford endowed by Miss M. P. Wale. Thirteen little girls went there to learn needlework and reading, and at Whitsun they were each given a frock of stout blue cotton with white or yellow sprigs on it; white shoulder capes and a new straw bonnet trimmed with flowers and blue ribbons. On Sunday they attended church at either Great or Little Shelford, wearing their new finery, and the young men used to call out: 'Look here come the Little Shelford girls with their new clothes on.'

The village policeman of Manea said in 1936² that 'veal is always eaten here at Whitsun'. In many Cambridgeshire families Whitsunday is the day for eating the first gooseberry pie of the year with, if possible, the first home-grown new potatoes.

Mother Shipton's Day

In 1964 Mrs H. Gawthrop, aged 82, a former Cambridge resident, supplied the information that in her youth the washerwomen in the

¹ In many Cambs. villages children wore oak leaves or oak apples on May 29th. They were pinched or strung with nettles by their companions if they failed to do so.

² Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

many small hand laundries in the town at that time used to drink rum in their tea on the Wednesday in Whitsun Week. They called the day *Mother Shipton's Holiday*. The observance of this custom was confirmed by an informant in 1966, who was told by a Great Eversden woman, who died in 1937 at the age of 98, that she could remember the rum-drinking and that 'Mother Shipton was the patron saint of laundresses'.

Harvest

Until the early years of this century the labour of getting in the harvest was usually more than could be supplied by the regular workers on farms. Extra staff had, therefore, to be engaged in the form of casual labourers¹ who generally offered their services year after year to the same farmer. These men demanded a fair price for their work and so, on the day before harvesting was due to commence, the customary procedure of agreeing upon the wages to be paid was carried out. It was known, especially in the Fens, as *Taking the Harvest*.

The men, having appointed one of their number to act as spokesman, would meet the farmer on the appointed day; all the fields to be harvested would be examined and the farmer would state the price he was prepared to pay for the cutting and carting of each crop. Invariably this price would be considered too low and there would follow an hour or two of bargaining which usually ended in the difference between what the men wanted and what the farmer offered being split. When agreement was finally reached, the farmer would give a largesse of beer money to the labourers and often add an extra shilling to the final price. The spokesman who had been appointed by his fellow labourers remained their supervisor throughout the harvest and was, in many Cambridgeshire villages, known as the *Lord of the Harvest*.

In Guilden Morden a half-holiday was given to the farm men on the day before harvest was to start so that they could do the customary *Beer-Ordering* in Ashwell, spending the largesse received on completion of the harvesting negotiations.

In 1962 Mr K. Tebbitt of Orchard Farm, Toft, recalled that in his youth the men hoping to get casual harvest work would arrive at the farm and announce their presence by scraping their scythes on the

¹ In many parts of Cambs. these casual workers were often, in the last century, Irishmen (locally known as *Patsies*) who had come to England, in the days of famine and unemployment in their own country, to look for work.

cobbled yard. After the hiring arrangements were made each man received a shilling and a pint of beer.

In Fordham, until 1930, the owner of a 400-acre farm gave each of his men, on the completion of the harvest, one shilling and three bushels of malt which would provide each man with three and a half barrels of beer. At the same time he gave largesse to his horse-keepers.¹

Harvesting began soon after sunrise. To ensure that workers were in the fields at the appointed time it was the custom, in many south Cambridgeshire villages, for a boy or man to go round the streets at daybreak blowing a horn to rouse the labourers. Many of these horns, made of tin, 12 to 16 inches long and 2 to 3 inches in diameter at the wider end, were sold at Stourbridge Fair (*q.v. infra*). The one formerly used in Horseheath is in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

One of the last of the Cambridgeshire horn-blowers was William King of Melbourn, who died in 1935 at the age of 84. He was first chosen to blow the horn when he was 7 years old, and he continued to do so for many years in Shepreth and Meldreth as well as in Melbourn.

From Little Shelford comes a recollection² of the *shoeing* of every new worker in the harvest field. The Lord of the Harvest knocked with a stone on the soles of the shoes of every newcomer and ordered him to pay a shilling, before work began, towards the purchase of beer.

The ceremonial bringing in of the last—or Horkey³—load on the completion of harvesting was observed in most Cambridgeshire villages, particularly those in the south of the county. The Lord, with attendant harvest-men, rode triumphantly into the village seated on the Horkey Cart, which was festooned with branches, and often accompanied by his Queen. The last-named could be a man dressed as a woman or, as people in, for example, Barrington, Wimpole and Linton have recalled, a pretty girl adorned with a wreath of corn and flowers and carrying a great bunch of ribbon-tied, flower-decked wheat.

This human Queen of the last and preceding two centuries replaced the richly dressed puppet, made of corn, which once accompanied the load and, as will be described later, presided over the harvest

¹ Recalled, 1951, by members of the Women's Institute.

² Recorded from a 78-year-old inhabitant in 1952.

³ *Horkey*: a harvest-home or supper; the last load in harvest. Wright: *Dial. Dict.* This is the usual spelling in Cambs., but the variants *hawky*, *hawkey*, are also known. The post-harvest meetings of some Young Farmers' Clubs in the county sometimes take the form, nowadays, of a Horkey Supper.

festivities in at least one Cambridgeshire village. Certainly the human Queen was a well-established participant in the harvest rejoicings of the county in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

Even in the town of Cambridge and centre of our University, such curious remains of ancient customs may be noticed, in different seasons of the year, which pass without observation . . . At the Hawkie, as it is called, I have seen a clown dressed in woman's clothes, having his face painted, his head decorated with ears of corn, and bearing about him other symbols of Ceres, carried in a waggon, with great pomp and loud shouts, through the streets, the horses being covered with white sheets; and when I enquired the meaning of the ceremony was answered by the people, that *they were drawing the HARVEST QUEEN*.¹

At Whittlesford, until *c.* 1885,² the villagers gathered on the roadside, waving and cheering, as the Horkey Load went by with the Lord, his Queen and the harvesters perched on top, all shouting 'Horkey home! Now water!' The spectators responded to the cry by throwing pails of water over the cart, an act which may, in earlier times, have been one of imitative magic to encourage rain to fall on the seed of the next harvest.

In the evening Harvest or Horkey Suppers were given by farmers to the harvest men and their wives in barns decorated with flowers, corn and fruit. Beef, plum pudding and beer constituted the traditional menu and after the meal there was music and dancing. At Grantchester, it was recorded in 1875,³ a money payment had already, by that date, replaced the Horkeys at which, in former times, had always been sung:

Here's a health unto our Master,
The founder of the Feast,
And we do wish with all our hearts
His soul in Heaven may rest,
And that all things may prosper
That here he takes in hand,
For we are all his servants
And all at his command.

So drink, boys, drink, and mind you do not spill,
For if you do you shall drink two,
It is our Master's will.

¹ E. D. Clarke: *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, Pt. II, Sect. 1, 1812.

² Recorded by George Maynard in his MS. account of the village, 1905.

³ S. P. Widnall: *History of Grantchester*.

The song was repeated as many times as there were people present, while a cup of ale was handed to each man in turn, which he had to empty during the singing of the chorus.

In 1934 Mr G. Bailey recalled¹ the bringing in of the last load and the following Horkey in Harston in 1875:

After the corn was all carted it was the custom to parade the village street with the last load. This consisted of rakings gathered up after the field had been cleared of all the shocks of corn. The last cart was brought on to the field and carefully loaded, as it was meant to carry the pitcher, rake and leader and any of the rick builders who were brave enough to face the ordeal which awaited them.

On the village green leafy boughs with long stems were cut and stuck in the top of the load so as to form a kind of bower for the protection (from water) of those on top. When all this was ready and everyone in their places hidden by the boughs that thickly hedged the load of rakings, the driver, sitting well under a heap of corn, took the reins and with a cry of *hold-gee*, began the journey through the village, where the youths and maidens with pails of water were anxiously waiting our coming. We entered the village street singing *The Farmer's Boy* and were greeted with the cheering of the crowd. Very soon—swish—came a shower of water first from one side and then from the other. The stream running by the roadside at Harston was the arsenal from which they drew their ammunition to bombard us, and we were quickly drenched to the skin. But the water could not douse our spirit, we kept up with our song. When we arrived at the fountain by the Pembroke Arms our ordeal was ended and we returned unmolested, the crowd cheering all along the route.

When the thatching of the ricks was completed and the corn protected against the coming winter, preparations for the Horkey or Hawky were taken in hand. Every employee on the farm was invited and the wives of the married men received a special invitation from the farmer's good lady.

The cart shed was cleared out and cleaned up; tables were improvised, trestles and boards being covered with spotless white cloths. The walls were suitably decorated and a really good substantial supper was laid out. The floral displays always showed good taste and the colour scheme was excellent. After supper the Master called for order and in a speech thanked his men and their wives for the part they had taken in making the harvest a success.

I would like to say that the women always tied up behind their husbands when reaping was in progress and helped with the setting up of the shocks at the end of the day.

The Master's speech was usually followed by *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow*. The oldest hand was spokesman for the farm hands and he usually spoke in a manner that gave an index to the mind. There was no music, of course, but some of the voices heard at the horkeys were really good . . .

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

For the Harvest Festival church services which, from the later years of the nineteenth century, replaced the more ebullient celebrations of the safe in-gathering of the corn, were made the intricately woven Corn Dollies. These, though not often in the form of a human figure, kept alive the memory of the straw puppet already mentioned, which in pre-Reformation days not only presided over the harvest revels but was allowed, with all its pagan associations, to be taken into the church. In the last century the Dolly, traditionally made of the last corn to be cut in the harvest field, was preserved for twelve months in some Cambridgeshire farmhouses with the, by them, somewhat vague feeling that it was 'lucky' to do so to ensure a good harvest in the following year.

In 1951 the following memory of probably one of the last instances of the making of a straw puppet in Cambridgeshire was collected from a 76-year-old Eastbourne man who was visiting the Cambridge Folk Museum:

I can remember seeing one of those Corn Dollies like that one there¹ for the first time. It was when I was twelve, and lived in Shoreditch in London. My grandmother came that year to live with us as grandfather had died. She brought with her a few things from her home in Royston and one of them was the last corn doll, just like that one, that my grandfather had made. It was the first time I'd seen one as, for family reasons, we didn't go and stay with my grandparents while grandfather was alive. She often used to tell of how, when she was a young girl in Litlington, in Cambridgeshire, the harvest workers on the farm where her parents had a tied cottage—Russell was the name of the farmer I believe—used to hold up the last shock of corn so that everyone could see it and all the workers gathered round and cheered.² Then one of the men made a kind of figure—a *proper dolly*—she used to call it, with a head, and arms and legs, out of the wheat from the shock, and tied ribbons round it. When they had the harvest supper the dolly sat in a special chair and after the meal was over the farmer carried it round the table several times and then, all the men following him—the women and girls weren't allowed to, she said, took it into the parlour and set it on top of the corner cupboard. I can remember, now, how funny this seemed to me, as I'd lived in Shoreditch all my life, so I never got tired of hearing about it and of how, when she was a little girl and used to go up to the farmhouse with her mother sometimes, she always tried to sneak off to the parlour to have a look at the straw dolly sitting on the cupboard. I can remember her saying that soon after she left Litlington when she got married—that must have been about 1848, I think, as my

¹ The Corn Doll shown in foreground of Plate 16.

² Here may be a reference to the custom, observed and recorded in Herts. of *Crying the Mare* (v. J. Brand: *Observ. on the Pop. Antiq. of Gt. Britain*, ed. Sir Henry Ellis, 1849, II, 24). Litlington is not far from the border of Herts.

mother, her only child, was born in 1850, they gradually stopped making the straw figure—new people came to the farm, I think she said—but a lot of people in the village made ‘fancy dollies’ like the one grandfather made—he worked on a farm in Royston. My grandmother died in 1903; she was 75. I’d left home by then, but I think my mother threw my grandfather’s corn doll away a year or so later.

The ‘fancy dolls’, as this informant insisted his grandmother called them, were made in the county in a wide range of designs: umbrellas (perhaps in token of the drenching with water of the horkey load); bells (recalling, perhaps, the bell-ringing and other musical accompaniments to the passage of the horkey cart); carters’ whips, horse-shoes and many other shapes. These are all still made. Indeed, over the past sixteen years there has been a noticeable revival of the craft of corn dolly making all over the country, including Cambridgeshire. Instruction classes are held at Evening Centres and Women’s Institutes, and craft shops are full of examples for sale.

Gleaning

The gleaning of the harvested fields by the village women after the harvesters had finished was usually supervised by one woman appointed to be the Queen. Her task was to see that all the gleaners began and ended work at the same time, thus ensuring a fair share for all. Any woman bold enough to start work before the signal to do so was given—usually by the ringing of a hand-bell or even of the church bell—had all her gleanings snatched from her and scattered on the ground by her angry fellow workers.

At Little Shelford, until the end of the last century the gleaning bell was tolled at eight o’clock in the morning. The Queen sat inside the field and, until she gave the signal, no one could begin to work. At eleven o’clock she ordered a halt for docky¹ and at one o’clock another break for dinner. Gleaning then continued through the afternoon until it was ended by the tolling of the church bell at five o’clock, or earlier if the Queen so decided. The women worked for about six weeks, wheat, barley and oats being gathered in that order and taken home in *pokes*—white cotton bags made especially for the purpose. All new gleaners were *shoed* by the Queen in the same way as has been described under *Harvesting*. It was the custom in this village for the long-stalked corn to be gleaned before dinner and the ‘heads’ in the afternoon.²

¹ Mid-morning snack of bread and cheese.

² Information from a Shelford inhabitant, 1956.

Sun bonnets were usually worn by gleaners to protect their heads, and especially the backs of their necks, from the sun. Often called *hoods* in Cambridgeshire, some bonnets had one frill at the nape of the neck, others two, while some villages seem to have kept to a particular colour. The women of Fordham, for example, preferred pink bonnets, those of Soham lilac ones.

Hallowe'en

The observance of Hallowe'en in Cambridgeshire seems to have been confined to the remoter parts of the Fens, where belief in and fear of witchcraft remained firmly established until well into the present century. Witches were traditionally believed to hold their meetings on this night, so Fen dwellers stayed indoors and took precautions. These included the placing of food on the doorstep to appease any witch who might approach the house; the putting of salt in the keyholes; the safe locking up of all the domestic and farm-yard animals; the killing of a cockerel and the hanging of its tail feathers on stable doors, and the strewing of osiers on all the exterior thresholds. The story of a Hallowe'en in the Fens at the end of the last century, related by one Job Harley to W. H. Barrett, is to be read in the latter's *More Tales from the Fens*.¹

Guy Fawkes Day—November 5th

This day is, of course, still observed by Cambridge and village children by the making of 'guys', which are then taken, often in roughly made wheeled 'carts' made from old boxes, into the streets, where money is hopefully expected. In most families where there are children fireworks are let off at night in gardens.

In Cambridge the night of November 5th is marked by the large number of policemen patrolling the centre of the City, where, until c. 1961, ugly scenes often occurred in the area round the Market Place. Youths from the villages and from Cambridge would let off fireworks, overturn parked cars and provoke undergraduates to join in the disturbances. In c. 1949 a number of windows of the Guildhall were broken. The University authorities have now banned students from the centre of the City on this night, except on their way to or

¹ Pub. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.

from dining in their College Halls; Guy Fawkes night in 1966, although falling on a Saturday, was the quietest on record.

W. H. Barrett remembers from his youth at the end of the last century the verses chanted by himself and his friends when asking for money for the Guy they had made:

Remember, remember the fifth of November,
 The gunpowder treason and plot;
 There is no reason why gunpowder treason
 Should ever be forgot.
 Guy, guy, stick him on high,
 Hang him on a gibbet and there let him die.
 Speak, man, speak; that shall be done;
 He has oil on his head and tar on his bum.
 Now give us something to buy a match
 So we can fire his greasy thatch.
 Ladies and gentlemen you'll never get fat
 If you don't put a penny in the old guy's hat.
 If you haven't a penny a halfpenny will do;
 If you haven't a halfpenny, God bless you.
 Holler, boys, holler, make the bells ring;
 Holler, boys, holler and God save the Queen.
 Hip, hip, hooray, for gunpowder plot
 Will never be forgot,
 So long as frumenty's¹ cooked in a pot.
 So holler, boys, holler, Old Guy will burn bright
 Time men get tight on Bonfire Night.

St Thomas's Day—December 21st

On December 21st, until the late nineteenth century, many old people in Cambridgeshire villages made a round of the more prosperous houses and farms soliciting money or small gifts for Christmas. The day was known as *Gooding Day* (e.g. in Haddenham), or *Gathering Day* (e.g. in Doddington) or *Mumping Day* (e.g. in Chatteris). A contributor to *Fenland Notes and Queries*² recorded that, in the last-named village, 'old men and old women and even young women pass from house to house begging alms. A great many residents make a rule of giving a penny each to all "mumpers"; others confine their gifts to widows and some, strangely, only acknowledge widowers.'

In Doddington the villagers announced their presence at each house they visited by the phrase: 'I've come gathering.'

¹ Hulled wheat boiled in milk with sugar and spices.

² Vol. I, 1889-91, 28.

Christmas

No complete Christmas Mummers' Plays are recorded in Cambridge-shire, although a few instances of almost-forgotten memories of ancient phrases suggest that plays were once performed in the villages of the county during the twelve days of the Christmas period. In 1935 members of Barton Women's Institute recalled that before Christmas Mummers with blackened faces used to parade the village and sing:

Mum, mum, mum, dad, dad, dad,
If you'd give me a halfpenny I shall be glad.
Jack, put my horse in the stable;
Yes, sir, if I'm able.
Able or not the work must be done,
So strike up the fiddle and play the drum.
Mum, mum, mum, dad, dad, dad.¹

S. P. Widnall of Grantchester recorded in his privately printed history of the village in 1875 that: 'On Christmas Eve the boys go mumping and people call them the mumps, evidently a corruption of Mummers. It has degenerated into a very insignificant performance and consists of boys with blackened faces and thick sticks, the end of which they knock on the ground outside people's houses crying "Mump, mump, mump, if you don't give me a penny I'll give you a thump".'

A Grantchester resident recalled in 1958 that her grandfather of the same village currently used the expression 'I'll mump you' when threatening to smack a naughty child.

In Cambridge the Town Waits used to parade the centre of the town during the six weeks or so preceding Christmas, entertaining the inhabitants with their music and singing. A diary² kept by a local resident between 1842 and 1883 refers several times to the musicians performing at what cannot have been the very welcome time of two o'clock in the morning. The Waits first appear in the records of the City in 1511, when four received payment for a performance. By the eighteenth century the number had increased to fifteen. Their services were required, in earlier days, not only at Christmas but also for plays, pageants and national celebrations. The minstrels were provided by the Corporation with cloaks, silver collars or chains and silver sleeve badges.

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² That of Josiah Chater. *v. Plough Monday*.

For many years the Bellmen of Cambridge produced annually, usually at Christmas, fly-sheets of verses which they distributed to householders in return for payment. In the Bodleian Library, Oxford, is an early MS. example of such verses by John Saul, addressed 'To the Right Worshipfull The Mayor and Aldermen & to ye rest of my Worthy Masters dwelling in Cambridge'. The sheet, reproduced here¹ by kind permission of the University Librarian, includes lines on the 'Lamentable Fire at New Market', the fire being probably the one referred to by Alderman Newton in his *Diary*² as occurring on 22nd March 1685.

A printed series of Bellmen's Verses ran from 1757.³ The early sheets were headed by a woodcut of a bellman standing, with his lantern, bell, pike and dog, in front of a building supposedly representing a town hall; in later sheets the bellman was shown beside Hobson's Conduit, which, until 1849, stood near the entrance to the Cambridge Guildhall.

Each sheet contained short verses addressed 'To the Mayor', 'To My Masters', 'To My Mistresses', 'To the Young Men', 'To the Young Maids', with others commemorating festivals such as St Luke's Day, Christmas, New Year and Innocents' Day. They were probably copied from the London series of Bellmen's Verses. In 1820 Isaac Moule became Bellman and his verse sheets contain topical allusions, so it is possible that he was himself the writer of some, at least, of the lines.

When the Bellmen's sheets ended the lamplighters of Cambridge continued the custom of having fly-sheets of Christmas Verses printed by Wilson, a printer in Jordan's Yard who also wrote the lines. These sheets were distributed by the lamplighters when they went round soliciting Christmas boxes, until the practice was stopped by the Gas Company in the 1880s.

Lamplighters' Verses sheets of the 1840s and 1860s, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, have no woodcuts. The verses are addressed to the Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Vice-chancellor, the Mayor, the Young Men and the Maids, and there are a Prologue and an Epilogue. The Prologue of 1844 gives an idea of the general quality of the poetry:

¹ Plate 17.

² Ed. J. E. Foster, 1890, p. 84.

³ On 17 May 1915 the Rev. H. P. Stokes read a paper (subs. printed in the *Camb. Antiq. Soc. Communications*, Vol. XX), on the Cambridge Bellmen. He referred to copies of the Bellmen's Verses for the years 1780, 1786, 1805, 1815, 1816, 1819, 1824, 1826, 1829, 1830 and 1831 as 'preserved in the Free Library'. Some copies are now missing.

Most worthy Mistresses and Masters all,
 Upon you once more we grateful call,—
 And in humble rhyme again rehearse
 Our thankfulness in limping verse.—
 Through fog and mist a brilliant light,
 We spread around—with our Gas so bright,
 To guide the traveller on his way—
 So generous patrons now we pray,
 Encourage us in our career,
 At this festive season of the year,
 And you will ever, our friends so kind,
 The gas-Lamplighter most grateful find.

A Cambridge box-maker, Richard Robinson, trading from the 1850s to the 1880s, was in the habit of writing little books of verses which he had printed and which he sold to his customers and others for 2d. each. At Christmas he distributed to his customers fly-sheets printed with a Christmas song or poem of his own composition, stating at the end that 'R. Robinson takes this opportunity of returning his sincere thanks to all his customers for past favours, and hopes they will still continue to patronize him, and wishes them all A Merry Christmas'. The sheets were, presumably, given away.¹

Boxing Day

From the last few years of the last century until the custom was discontinued in 1914 men in the Newmarket Road area of Cambridge used to race pony-drawn costermongers' barrows to the Swan public house in Bottisham and back, a distance in all of five miles. The first prize was £1. The races were organised by a local publican and his friends; a small entrance fee was charged and the money thus raised was given to Addenbrooke's Hospital.

It was recorded in 1934² that at Bottisham 'there used to be *rough dancing* on Boxing Day. The men daubed their faces and danced to rough music of pots and pans.'

Until the interwar years the Cambridgeshire Hunt met on Market Hill, Cambridge, on the morning of Boxing Day.

New Year's Eve

In Over in the last century the bell-ringers of the parish held their annual supper on New Year's Eve in the Swan Inn. They ate roast beef and drank *Hot Pot* made by the publican from beer, spirits, eggs,

¹ One of these fly-sheets, 1865, is in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

² Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

sugar, nutmeg and milk. This was imbibed from a cow horn known as a *Long Tot* or a *Long Tom*.¹

Services, held round about midnight and known as Watch Night Services, are still held in several churches in Cambridge and the villages, although the custom seems to be less commonly observed now than earlier in the century.

Fairs and Village Feasts

Fairs

The fair granted by King Stephen to the Prioress and nuns of the Priory of St Radegund in Cambridge is slenderly documented. The eve and feast of the Assumption (14 and 15 August) were the days assigned for the fair, a third day being added by charter of Henry VI. The name *Garlic Fair* first occurs in Jesus College² Bursars' Accounts for 1557-8, when a sum of three shillings and sixpence was paid for, among other things, the repairing of the lead in the south window of the Chapel 'next to the garlick fayre close'. This close is now part of the Master's garden. After 1496 the fair moved to a site near Jesus Ditch at the end of the modern Park Street, formerly known as Garlic Fair Lane.

The profits of the fair—never an important one for trade—were included in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the lease of Radegund Manor;³ from 1635 until 1709 appears in the College Accounts, with some omissions in later times, the sum of £1 received annually as profits of the fair. Up to 1838, however, when the Manor House was pulled down, in every lease was a covenant that the College 'shall have liberty to keep a fair within and over the close, or such part as hath been used for that purpose, on the feast day of the Assumption yearly . . .'

In 1809 the *New Cambridge Guide* refers to the fair as 'nearly abolished'. Bowtell⁴ wrote of Garlic Fair: 'it is still constantly observed by the Inhabitants of Jesus Lane who claim it as a Privilege belonging peculiarly to their Situation and invite Strangers to partake of their Festivity in strong ale and cheerless Frumenty. But these Meetings are now attended with far less Rejoicings than they were

¹ The work of a Tutorial Class in Local History at Swavesey Village College, 1958-61. Their work was published in 1961 in a pamphlet under the title: *Fen and Upland: 2,000 Years of Local History*.

² Bishop Alcock refounded the Nunnery as Jesus College in 1497.

³ The Manor House of St Radegund's was demolished in 1831. All Saints' Vicarage in Jesus Lane now stands on the site.

⁴ MSS. in Downing College Library.

formerly, when Minstrels and Musicians were engaged to heighten the celebrations.¹

The nuns of the Priory, although known to have attended Midsummer and Stourbridge and Ely Fairs, do not seem to have made purchases at their own fair.

The fair still held in Cambridge on June 22nd and the three days following, known now as Midsummer Fair, was granted by King John in c. 1211 to the Priors and Canons of Barnwell, the grant being confirmed in 1229, when the Priors and Canons were allowed to hold a fair for four days beginning on the Vigil of St Etheldreda¹ in the summer.

Tradition ascribes the origin of the fair to the existence of 'some springs, fresh and pure . . . in English called Barnewell, that is Children's Wells,² at the time so called because once a year, on the Vigil of the Nativity of St John Baptist, boys and youths used to meet there and . . . engaged in wrestling . . . and with songs and music applauded each other. So it happened that owing to the multitude of boys and girls resorting thither . . . it became a custom for a crowd of merchants to meet there on the same day to traffic and buy and sell. . . .'³

The fair, held on that part of the common land known since the charter of King John as Midsummer Common, is still proclaimed at noon on the first day by the Mayor, who is attended by his Town Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Mace and Aldermen and Councillors of the City Corporation. After the reading of the traditional proclamation, which relates mainly to the maintenance of order during the fair, new halfpennies are thrown to the listening crowds.⁴ The Mayor and other officials then open the fair by riding on the swings, dodgems and other devices. In earlier days the Timber Fair, held on Newmarket Road, and forming part of the Midsummer Fair, was proclaimed separately. From it could be bought, until the turn of the century, turned ware, rushes and wood of all kinds, together with chairs, tables and stools. Until the mid-nineteenth century the Horse Fair was an important section of the Midsummer Fair.

The fair was formerly proclaimed by the University as well as by

¹ St Etheldreda founded an Abbey at Ely for both monks and nuns in c. AD 673. Her feast in the Roman Calendar falls at midsummer. From the wording of the Charter the Midsummer Fair became associated for a time with the Saint, and the tawdry laces referred to below under *Ely Fairs* were also sold in Cambridge.

² The name *Barnwell* (earlier spelt *Berneuwell*, *Beorneuwell*) prob. means 'Warrior's spring', or, less probably, 'Beorna's spring'.

³ *Ecclesie de Bernewelle Liber Memorandum*, ed. J. W. Clark, 1907.

⁴ Plates 18 and 19.

the Corporation, the Vice-Chancellor, noblemen, doctors and other officials partaking first of cakes and wine in the Senate House before riding in coaches to Barnwell. The proclamation was made first in the middle of the village of Barnwell and then on the site of the fair. The day was considered important enough to be declared a *Scarlet Day*—one on which doctors were obliged to wear their scarlet gowns.

In the eighteenth century the fair was commonly called *Pot Fair*¹ on account of the china auctions held, and, as the fair occurred at the time of Commencement, when Masters' degrees were conferred in the University, it became customary for senior and junior members of the latter, together with the local gentry, to go to the fair each night to watch the selling of china, pictures and millinery. Firms from the Potteries still bring large quantities of earthenware and china to the fair. When lace curtains were popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many Nottingham firms brought their wares, too, finding a ready sale for them among Cambridgeshire residents, since prices were considerably lower than those in the local shops.

Gingerbread, fashioned in wooden moulds to resemble figures of men and women known as 'husbands and wives', was an important sweetmeat sold at the Midsummer as at many other fairs. The custom died out early in this century, however, and today brandy snaps have replaced the gingerbread figures.

Peppermint and fruit-flavoured rock, in a variety of colours, is still sold from many stalls, together with pink and white, almond-decorated nougat (invariably pronounced *nugget*), made in large round cake-shaped moulds and cut in small pieces for convenience of sale.²

The chief Cambridge makers and sellers of these confections are the Reynolds family, headed now by Jim Reynolds, aged 75, of Newmarket Road. It was his grandfather, William, who about the year 1846 began to make rock for sale on Cambridge market and who, with donkey and cart, travelled to all the feasts and fairs in the Eastern Counties with his wares. He was followed by his son James, who, in turn, set up *his* son, the present Jim Reynolds, in business in 1907, when he bought him a pony and cart.

Jim Reynolds can recall the times when he used to begin sugar-boiling at three o'clock in the morning, often having to do from twelve to fourteen boilings a day. For many years he hand-pulled

¹ Plates 20 and 21.

² Of recent years stalls selling hot sausages, with or without onions, served sandwiched in bread rolls, have increased in number. The sale of small dishes of cockles and pease pudding has long been customary, although the last-named dish is less in evidence now.

his rock and cut it into small pieces with scissors; machines were expensive, costing up to £80 each.

Today Jim's sons, Jim junior and Jack, have their own separate confectionery businesses in Newmarket Road; they, too, attend the Midsummer Fair and Cambridge market as well as Ely, Wisbech, Chatteris and other fairs. There are cousins, too, in the confectionery business and another relative whose home is appropriately named *Rockfella House*. Jim junior, like his father, is always seen on the market and at the fairs in white coat and bowler hat, the latter bearing the proud title of ROCK KING in large letters on the crown; but it is the 75-year-old Jim who claims that he is still head of the family and the original king.

The third Cambridge fair was the world-famous one known as *Stourbridge Fair* which King John granted to the Leper Hospital¹ of St Mary Magdalene, to be held on the Vigil and Feast of Holy Cross, September 12th and 14th. The length of the fair was gradually extended until it finally occupied almost three weeks, the Horse Fair, which by Act of 1555 had to be held separately, beginning on September 25th. Stourbridge Common, on which the fair was held, is, like the Midsummer Fairground, near the river. This meant that, in the times when large vessels could easily come upstream, merchandise from all over the world could be brought to both Midsummer and Stourbridge Fairs.

Proclamation of Stourbridge Fair was from 1533 to 1855 made by both the University and the Corporation of Cambridge, in the years of even dates the Corporation proclaiming it first. After 1855 the Corporation alone proclaimed or 'called' the fair.

Henry Gunning² describes the proclaiming of 1789, when, after the customary partaking of mulled wine, sherry and cakes in the Senate House, the Vice-Chancellor, Bedells,³ Proctors,⁴ Taxors⁵ and

¹ Only the chapel of this hospital now stands, near the Newmarket Road railway bridge. For many years until the early 1840s the chapel was used as a store place for the timbers, etc., of the stalls at Stourbridge Fair.

² Henry Gunning: *Reminiscences of the University, Town and County of Cambridge*, 1854, I, 148-58.

³ *Bedells*: two graduate members of the University, called *Esquire Bedells*, attend the Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor on public occasions in the Senate House and elsewhere. They carry silver maces presented by the Duke of Buckingham, Chancellor, in 1626. A third official, the *Yeoman Bedell*, was appointed until 1858, when the office was abolished. His mace is now borne by the University Marshal. See Plate 22.

⁴ *Proctors*: see under *University Customs: Proctors and Bulldogs*.

⁵ *Taxors*: these officials were responsible for the inspection of the Weights and Measures of Cambridge and had the exclusive privilege of weighing hops and leather in Stourbridge Fair.

the Commissary¹ and others rode in carriages to the fair, where the Registry² read the proclamation, which was repeated by the Yeoman Bedell in three different places. After this they went to the *Tiled Booth*, passing through an upper room to the 'University Dining Room'. Here they were joined by numbers of Masters of Arts 'who had come for the express purpose of eating oysters. This was a very serious part of the day's proceedings and occupied a long time.' The dining-room was then left for the waiters to clear away the oyster shells and prepare for dinner.

Before the Vice-Chancellor was placed a large dish of herrings; then followed in order a neck of pork roasted, an enormous plum pudding, a pease-pudding, a goose, a huge apple pie, and a round of beef in the centre. On the other half of the table the same dishes were placed in similar order (the herrings before the Senior Proctor) . . .

. . . The Corporation proclaimed the fair, and had their dinner also; but it possess this advantage over ours, that it was given at a private house where they were served with an abundance of venison and game.

The *Tiled Booth* to which Gunning refers became known later as the *Oyster House*;³ it was pulled down in 1960. It was in use as a place for eating and drinking in during the fair until the latter part of the nineteenth century, being used by then for the Corporation dinners after the University had ceased to proclaim the fair. Beer was served on the second floor and dancing was held on the third floor. The tenants of the house, owned then by a local brewery, were, by terms of their lease, obliged to allow the dancing-room to be used in fair time.

Music for the dancing was provided, from the 1890s until shortly before 1930, by Harry Day,⁴ a well-known performer on the whistle who died in 1966, and by 'Herb' Reynolds, who could play an *Anglia* harp and a concertina simultaneously. When the Oyster House was pulled down evidence of the oyster feasts which had been held there was provided by the discovery of the lifting gear which raised the tanks of oysters from the cellars and, of course, by the finding of innumerable shells.

An account of the mayoral proclamation of the fair in 1668 is

¹ *Commissary*: an assistant or assessor to the Vice-Chancellor in his court.

² *Registry*: the permanent secretary to the Council of the Senate. He has to keep the record of University proceedings, for preservation in the Registry, to attend the meetings, called *Congregations*, of the Senate and to edit the official gazette of the University. His office dates from 1506.

³ Plate 23.

⁴ Plate 24.

given by Alderman Newton in his *Diary*. The Aldermen and Common Councillors rode first to the house of 'Mr New Elect'—the alderman chosen a few days before to be Mayor during the ensuing year. After partaking there of sack¹ and sugar cakes² the company rode to the Mayor's house and then to the fairground, where the proclamation was read in two places. Returning to the Guildhall, more sack, rolls and sugar cakes were consumed, and then everyone went to Mr New Elect's house for dinner, at which were served:

2 dishes of boyled chickens then a leg of mutton boyled, then a peece of rost beefe, then a mutton pasty, then a glass of Clarett round, then 2 couple of rabbetts, 2 couple of small wildfoule, and 2 dishes of tarts 3 in a dish.

This proclamation was on St Bartholomew's Day, August 24th. The main fair was again proclaimed a fortnight later, on September 7th, when the Aldermen and Common Councillors, regaled once more by Mr New Elect with cakes and sack, called for the Mayor and, with him, rode to the fair, proclaiming it first in the Duddery or wool fair, then by the goldsmiths, next in garlic row, next at the water fair and finally on Honey Hill³. The Mayor's court was then opened and proclaimed before the company adjourned for dinner, of which Aldermen Newton gives no details.

When the Corporation proclaimed the fair in 1727 the procession was composed of, in order:

The Crier in Scarlet on horseback.

28 Petty Constables on foot.

Three Drums.

Banners and Streamers.

The grand Marshal.

Two Trumpets.

The Town Music (12 in number).

Two French Horns.

The Bellman in state with the stand on Horseback.

Four Serjeants at Mace on Horseback.

The Mayor in his robes mounted on a Horse richly caparisoned, led by two footmen called redcoats with white wands.

The two representatives in Parliament on Horseback.

Twelve Aldermen according to seniority on Horseback (three and three) in their proper robes, the six seniors having their horses attended by as many Henchmen or redcoats with wands.

¹ *Sack*: a general name for a glass of white wines formerly imported from Spain and the Canaries. *O.E.D.*

² *Sugar-cake*: a rich cake made with sugar, butter and cream. *O.E.D.*

³ Honey Hill at the Fair was probably the site of the honey-sellers' booths. Alt. may be *Muddy Hill*.

The Twenty four Common Councilmen three and three according to seniority.

Eight Dispencers in their Gowns (two and two).

Four Bailiffs in their habits (two and two).

The Gentlemen and Tradesmen of the Town.¹

It is not, perhaps, surprising, that this procession was, after 1758, curtailed 'owing it is said to the trouble and charge of keeping it in a suitable condition'.²

Many notable authors³ have written of the fair and of its ancient customs. Among the last reference might here briefly be made to the *Court of Piepowders*,⁴ held by the Mayor of Cambridge, in which disputes between merchants and buyers were settled on the fair-ground. To assist him in the general keeping of the peace at the fair the Mayor had eight sergeants who were known, from their attire, as *Red Coats*. Should any quarrel or argument break out, a shout of 'Red Coat! Red Coat!' immediately brought one of these officials to the scene. The sergeants kept a close watch, too, for cheats and pickpockets and their constant cry of 'Look about you, there!' added to the bustle, noise and excitement of the fair.

There was, too, a curious figure appointed to taste the ale sold in the booths and so prove it was in good condition. He was known as *Lord of the Taps*, and although it is not known when his office was founded, in the year 1655 the Corporation of Cambridge ordered that:

. . . xx^s shall be given out of the moneys in the chest to Michael Wolfe towards the buyinge of a Coate against Sturbridge Fayer now next ensuinge, he being Lord of the Taps this present yeare.

The coat referred to was of crimson cloth decorated with barrel taps. That the Lord presented an eye-catching appearance is gathered from Edward Ward's description of him in 1700 as 'Arm'd all over with spiggots⁵ and fossets⁶ like a porcupine with his quills, or looking rather like a fowl wrapped up in a pound of sausages'.

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, IV, 195.

² Bowtell MSS. in Downing College Library.

³ e.g. Daniel Defoe: *Tour through the Eastern Counties*, 1724; Edmund Carter: *History of Cambridge*, 1753. John Bunyan is traditionally said to have based his account of *Vanity Fair* in his *Pilgrim's Progress* on his observations at Stourbridge Fair.

⁴ *Court of Piepowders*: alt. *Piepowder Court*, *Court of Piepowder*: a summary court formerly held at fairs and markets to administer justice among itinerant dealers, etc. *O.E.D.*

⁵ *Spigot*: a small wooden peg or pin used to stop the vent-hole of a barrel or cask. *O.E.D.*

⁶ *Faucet*: 1. As *spigot* (above). 2. A tap for drawing liquor from a barrel. *O.E.D.*

John Bowtell, the eighteenth-century Cambridge bookbinder and antiquary, wrote of the Lord of the Taps that wherever he went he was

preceded by a merry piece of music. The fair keepers usually make him a present. The title arose from the united voice of the fair keepers, both publicans and traders, the former being under the same restraint in tapping their ale as the latter were in retailing their goods before he had passed by in form after the proclamation.¹

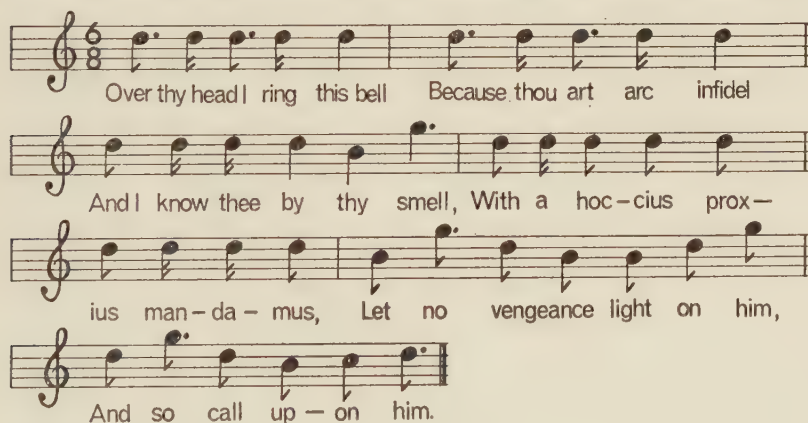
Final reference may be made to the curious custom of Initiation or 'Christening' which arose in *c.* 1762 and which took place on the day of the Horse Fair in the Robin Hood Inn on the fairground.

The newcomer was introduced to the older members in the inn parlour and, when sponsors had been chosen, was seated in an arm chair, bareheaded and with his shoes removed. The officiator put on a college cap and gown and, with a book in one hand and a bell in the other, began the ceremony by asking: 'Is this an Infidel?' On receiving the reply: 'Yes', he further demanded:

'What does he require?'

'Instruction,' came the reply.

'Where are the sponsors? Let them stand forward.' Whereupon a bowl of punch was placed on the table and the officiator chanted:



2. This child was born in the merry month of may,
Clap a pound of butter to his cheek and it will soon melt away,
And if he longs for a sop, let him have it I pray—

Chorus: From his hoccus, etc.

3. This child's shoes are made of running leather,
He'll run from father and mother the deuce knows whither
And he may run the length of his tether—

Chorus: To a hoccus, etc.

¹ MS. *History of the Town of Cambridge*, Downing Coll. Lib.

4. This child now to Stirbitch fair is come,
 He may wish to kiss a pretty wench ere he returns home,
 But let him be advised not to Barnwell¹ roam—
Chorus: For a hoccus, etc.

Here the officiator turned and asked: 'Who names this child?' The sponsors then gave some ridiculous name—'Nimble Heels', or 'Stupid Stephen', on hearing which the officiator drank some punch and gave a glass to the novice before continuing:

5. 'Nimble-heels', henceforward shall be his name,
 Which to confess let him not feel shame,
 Whether 'fore master, miss or dame—
Chorus: With a hoccus, etc.
6. This child having first paid his dues,
 Is welcome then to put on his shoes,
 And sing a song, or tell a merry tale, as he may choose—
Chorus: About a hoccus, etc.
7. Then hand the can unto our jolly friar,
 And laugh and sing as we sit round the fire,
 And when our wine is out let all to bed retire—
Chorus: With a hoccus, etc.

The initiate then told a good tale and a substantial supper concluded the ceremony.²

Stourbridge Fair began to decline as a trading mart in the eighteenth century and continued to do so throughout the last and the present centuries. The Horse Fair, which outlived in importance the rest of the fair, lingered on until the First World War. In 1930, when the Mayor proclaimed Stourbridge Fair, there were only six onlookers and the fair consisted of a single traction engine with a cargo of swing boats. In 1931 even the swings were absent and the only witnesses of the proclamation, which by then was recognised to have become a mere statutory formality, were a policeman and two men. The ancient fair was, therefore, ended by royal decree and was called for the last time in 1933 when the Mayor, Mrs F. Keynes, attended by the Clerk of the Peace and the Sergeant-at-Mace, performed the ceremony before an audience of two women with babies in their arms and a solitary ice-cream seller with his barrow.

From early times it was the custom for a service to be held on the fairground each Sunday during the time of Stourbridge Fair, the

¹ Barnwell, formerly a separate village and now part of Cambridge, was notorious until the late nineteenth century for the number of prostitutes who lived there.

² William Hone: *The Year Book of Daily Recreation and Information* . . . 1838.

preacher being paid a fee raised by the voluntary contributions of the keepers of the trading booths.

In 1650 the Corporation of Cambridge decided that, following recent controversies about the choice of the preacher, the authority to select one should be vested in the Mayor and Aldermen, who would make their choice annually on the day of the Mayor's election. Usually they chose the minister of Barnwell, but sometimes, e.g. in 1710, the Rev. Henry Crispe, a Fellow of King's College, was appointed, to the annoyance of the then minister of Barnwell. This was not, however, the first time that the choice had fallen on a preacher other than the Barnwell incumbent; indeed, Dr John Moore, who, prior to becoming Bishop of Ely, had as minister of Barnwell preached the sermon on four occasions (1671-4), had published a declaration in 1671 that the choice of preacher lay solely with the town of Cambridge. But the Barnwell minister of 1710 advertised that the Rev. Henry Crispe, by preaching the fair sermon on the fairground which lay within the parish boundaries, was infringing the rights and privileges of the minister and patrons of the church. Proceedings were taken against Mr Crispe, who was censured in the Bishop's Court at Ely.¹

Of recent years a service held for the stallholders of Midsummer Fair has lapsed; it has, however, been revised in 1967.²

An elderly Girton resident³ recalled in 1932 that his father often spoke of the *Statutes* or Hiring Fair⁴ held on Hog Hill, now St Andrew's Hill, in the early years of the last century. Horsekeepers seeking new masters would stand holding whips or lashes of whipcord; cowmen fastened a cow's horn or hoof to the front of their smocks.

A fair is still held in Rogation Week in the village of Reach. Granted a charter by King John in 1200 to the burgesses of Cambridge, the fair had probably been in existence long before that date. Reach was formerly a place of some importance when the rivers Cam and Ouse were navigable for trading vessels; by means of the Reach Lode, the ancient artificial channel connecting the village to the main river, sea-going vessels were able, until 1650, to bring goods from abroad right into Reach.

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, III, 435; IV, 100-1.

² Plate 25.

³ In a lecture given in the village and reported in the *Camb. Weekly News*, 12 Dec. 1924.

⁴ *Statute*: *sing.* and *pl.*: short for *statute-sessions*. A fair or gathering held annually in certain towns or villages for the hiring of servants. *O.E.D.*

The Mayor and Corporation of Cambridge still go on Rogation Monday to proclaim what is now only a small amusement fair. It is customary that, after the proclamation, any Aldermen or Councillors attending for the first time should make a speech. The speakers are, according to their sex, known as 'colts' and 'fillies'.

In the year 1862 there was celebrated, in connection with the Reach Fair, a festival at Upware. At that time the coprolite-digging industry¹ was at its height and there were many casual labourers in the district, Reach being the centre for the work. It was decided, therefore, to hold a *Bustle*, as it was called, complementary to the celebrations of Reach Fair and the village feast of near-by Swaffham Prior which fell on Rogation Wednesday. Dr Charles Lucas has described² the event:

. . . So on the morning in question adult folks from the villages around began to assemble; dancing booths, skittle alleys, shell-fish barrows, etc. appeared on the scene and *bough houses* were everywhere in evidence. It was a custom then in Rogation days for the licensing authorities to allow anyone who hung a bough outside his house to sell beer, etc., without a licence . . .

Between ten and eleven o'clock things began to get a bit lively at Upware and boxing, or rather free fighting, seemed to be the order of the day . . . the Wicken and Swaffham police were dealt with summarily, one being pitched into the Lode and the other into the Fen drain. . . . At this time a crank from Cambridge, a Jesus graduate, Richard Ramsay Fielden, M.A., gave out that he was king and champion of Upware and he spent his time there arguing and fighting the bargees, fishing, etc. It was thought that he was the originator of the proceedings.

The following is an account given by an eye-witness:—

'Shoals of people were everywhere about and the heat was intense; the dancing booths were crammed full, pugilism was in the air, fighting was going on in all directions, in close proximity to love-making . . . and there was a babel of noise from the harp and violins, the blowing of horns and concertina playing. After each dance there would be a rattle of heels as was customary with the villagers. The whole pandemonium was punctuated by the noise of the skittle alley, a pastime much in vogue then.'

Ely still has two amusement fairs held during the last weekends of May and October. Originally there was one single fair—St Ethel-

¹ *Coprolite*: a stony, roundish fossil supposed to be the petrified excrement of an extinct animal. *O.E.D.* Coprolites were dug in Cambs., mainly between Horningsea and Melbourn and from Orwell to Duxford, especially during the period 1830–80, for use as fertilisers. During the First World War the digging was for a time revived near Hauxton, Grantchester and Trumpington.

² *A Fenman's World*, 1930.

dreda's or St Audrey's—granted a charter by Henry II and held on the anniversary of the saint's death and on the three following days. At the fair could be bought coloured ribbons or laces which, since they were declared to have touched the saint's shrine, were eagerly bought by pilgrims. They came to be known as *tawdry laces*, a word now firmly established in the English language to denote anything showy and of little value. Until 1913 or later such fairings, reproduced in lace and called St Audrey's Chains, were sold at Ely Fair.¹

St Etheldreda is traditionally said to have suffered from a tumour in her neck which she attributed to her love of wearing necklaces in her youth. The *Liber Eliensis*, however, relates that she once pleaded so eloquently on behalf of a penitent thief that his chains were struck off and he was restored to freedom. In his gratitude he later became a monk at Ely and hung his broken chains—henceforth associated with the saint—in the Cathedral as a votive offering.

Wisbech still holds a fair, now only for amusements, in August. It was originally a Hiring Fair, the men and women who sought new employment standing outside the Rose and Crown Inn to be selected. The present amusement fair held each September in the town of March was, again, once a Hiring Fair.

Chatteris has two fairs, both now for amusements only. One is held on the first Friday in April, the other, originally a Hiring or Statute Fair, on the Friday before October 11th. They now take place in the Recreation Ground and not, as formerly, in the street.

Many Cambridgeshire villages, in earlier times, had fairs granted, usually, to the Lord of the Manor. Soham, for example, had an annual Stock Fair until the nineteenth century and a Lamb Fair in July. Ickleton, so Women's Institute members recalled in 1935,² once had a Horse Fair and a Cheese Fair. Members of Weston Colville's Women's Institute recalled in 1957 the old Horn Fair for the sale of horned cattle in August, and how the women used to gather on the last day in the Three Horseshoes public house and play bowls.

Many of the old village fairs were for the sale of one particular merchandise. At Wisbech, for example Hemp and Flax Fairs were held on the day before and after Palm Sunday, on the Saturday before Whitsunday and, with horned cattle, on August 1st and 2nd.

¹ Many of the youths who now visit the Ely Fairs wear in their caps and on the lapels of their coats coloured buttons advertising, for the most part, the products of petrol firms. An Ely resident has suggested that these buttons are a survival, albeit unrecognised by their wearers, of the tawdry laces.

² Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

The Horse Fair was on July 25th and on the Monday before Whitsun, when horned cattle were again sold.¹ At the Caxton Michaelmas Fair there was, until the early nineteenth century, a brisk trade in gloves, hats and clothes, but by 1858 it had become a pedlary fair of little importance.²

Village Feasts

The annual feasts of Cambridgeshire villages, many of which still survive, coincide often with the patronal festival of the parish church; in some cases they occur on the same date as a fair held in former times, but now forgotten. In Cherry Hinton, for example, was once a fair held annually near the Chequers Inn; by 1888 it had become the Amusement Fair in Mill End Road. By 1937 it was the feast held, until 1939, in the first week in October, but now held no more.

The village feast was a general holiday in former times and provided an opportunity for family gatherings. Stalls were set up on village greens and in inn yards for the sale of such delicacies as sweetmeats, dishes of stewed prunes, pease pudding, frumenty and gingerbread. Swing boats, coconut shies and roundabouts were erected and there was always dancing. The miniature fairs which now tour Coton,³ Histon, Girton and many other villages still keep the feasts alive, but they are poor affairs now compared with those of the past.

Members of Barton Women's Institute recalled in 1956 that their feast was held on May 15th at the Hoop Inn, where swings were set up and there was a dance held in the evening for which the charge was one shilling or twopence for 'once round the floor'. Barton Feast was, as in several other villages in the county, an occasion for all the houses to be freshly lime-washed.

In 1957 Miss Johnson, then aged 88, recalled that Madingley Feast used to be held around the third Sunday after Whitsun. In her youth it was a tradition that each family should hold a feast of its own, the menu consisting of ham, beef, new potatoes, peas and home-made wine.

Villages sometimes exchanged visits at the time of their feasts. The people of Lolworth, for example, went over to Barton on the occasion of the latter's feast, to challenge the residents to a cricket match, while in the evening the men of Girton would walk over to drink in the Barton Inn. Madingley men came, too, and after the inn closed they

¹ *Universal British Directory*, 1798.

² W. M. Palmer: *Notes on Cambs. Villages*, 2, 1927.

³ Plate 26.

and the Girton men engaged in their annual fisticuffs and wrestling matches. Girton, in the last century, was well-known locally for its fighters. Barton Feast gradually diminished until, from about 1942, a few swing boats, stalls and coconut shies only were erected.

For Lolworth residents their feast brought a three days' holiday. Mr Barnard of Haslingfield brought over his home-made rock for sale and there were the usual swing boats and coconut shies set up by a man named Lawrence. Cricket matches with Boxworth, Longstanton and Swavesey were held and every family in the village made frumenty, free milk for its preparation being given by a local farmer, Mr Jacob Frohock.

W. K. Clay in his *History of Milton* (1869) recorded that 'Milton Feast began originally on Mid-Lent Sunday, known locally as *Peas Porridge Sunday*; it was later changed to the second Sunday in May'. He recorded, too, that *Frumenty Sunday* was the name given to the day of Waterbeach Feast.

Women's Institute members of Whaddon recalled in 1958 that their feast was held until 1880. Dancing was the main event, together with singing, to the tune of *Golden Slippers*, of the song:

We won't go home till morning,
We won't go home till morning,
Till daylight appear.
Three quarts more! Three quarts more!

The Rector of Leverington recorded in 1899¹ that Mid-Lent Sunday was still known at that date as *Whirling Sunday* and that several elderly residents could still dimly remember the amusements of the day, with boxing matches, games and sports. One or two families in the village still made small cakes known as *Whirling Cakes* in memory of an old woman of Leverington who, by tradition, was making cakes for some visitors one Feast Sunday when the devil appeared before her in a whirlwind and carried her off over the church steeple.

Little Abington's feast lasted from May 29th to May 31st. The last day, an annual holiday, was the occasion of cricket matches.

Histon Feast is still held in midsummer. A character still remembered was Dick Pont of Histon, who sold at his own feast and at others, 'Hot Rock' and other sweets called Hanky-pankys, together with dishes of prunes and pea soup.

Fordham still celebrates its feast on June 29th. Until earlier in this

¹ *Fenland Notes and Queries*, vol. I, 1889-91, p. 47.

century there was a Sunday Parade at which collections were taken for Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge. On the feast day itself there was dancing in a barn while a fun fair was set up in Smart's Close. It was customary for the villagers to challenge Isleham to a cricket match. A local resident, Mrs Hills, was well known for the stewed prunes she sold on feast day at the rate of five on a plate for a halfpenny.

Willingham Feast was already declining in the last years of the nineteenth century, but it was still an occasion for family reunions and there were always increased church attendances on Feast Sunday.

Wicken used to celebrate its feast in mid-May with sports, donkey races, climbing of greasy poles and such-like activities on the village green. The *Cambridge Independent Press* of 17 May 1863 records the visit of 'Pendle's Photographic Establishment' to the feast that year.

In 1881 Melbourn had trouble with its feast. The Vicar tried to have the stalls moved from the Green to the Recreation Ground because they obstructed free passage across the Green. Moreover, he wanted the feast to be held on one day only instead of on three. The villagers showed their disapproval of this by holding noisy processions, throwing stones, hissing and booing until the new arrangements were finally endorsed by the Home Secretary. A song often sung to the tune of *Who Killed Cock Robin?* as the processions marched was:

Who stopped the Feast?
I, said the Priest,
I'm a meddlesome beast,
I stopped the Feast.¹

Until the later years of the last century there was a fair held annually on Shrove Tuesday in the Camping Close at Sawston. Known as the Shingay-lane Fair, its chief attraction was the skipping enjoyed on the green by girls from Sawston and near-by villages.

Music for the dancing held at Cambridgeshire fairs and feasts was provided by local musicians playing fiddles, concertinas and dulcimers. The best-known makers of the last-named instrument were members of the Lawrence family of Haslingfield, Comberton and Triplow Heath. In the Cambridge Folk Museum is a dulcimer² made by George Willmott Lawrence, who died c. 1929, aged 73, having been born in Haslingfield. He moved to Thriplow Heath in 1888. He played as well as made dulcimers, at various feasts and fairs in the

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institute, 1956.

² Plate 27.

county. The Museum's example of his work was passed on to his son Herbert (1880-1947), who, in his younger days, used to take it to Comberton, where his cousin, William Lawrence, lived and who also played and made dulcimers. The two men used to spend all the summer months touring the feasts and playing for dancing in public houses and dancing booths.

Charlie Huntlea of Cambridge used to play the harp for dancing at Midsummer and Stourbridge Fairs and at some of the feasts.

Harry Huntley, not related to Charlie, was the last harp player known to have played for dancing. He and his father, Jack, who was a fiddler, used to play together at Comberton and other feasts and at the fairs. They took round with them a dancing booth with a sectional floor and a box for the musicians: the two Huntleys and a concertina player and a drummer. A box was placed in front of the booth for the collection of money. When long-wise country dances were in vogue it was easy for each dancer, as he reached the box, to place in it his fee for the players, but musicians found it more difficult to get their money when round dances, waltzes, etc., became more popular. To ensure that every dancer paid, someone had to be stationed at the door of the booth or other dancing place to collect the money as the dancers arrived.¹

Although villages often exchanged visits on the occasions of their respective feasts, these were not always for the purpose of a friendly game of cricket. In the Burwell and Wicken Fens, for example, it was a long-established tradition until about the mid-nineteenth century that when a village held its annual feast gangs of youths from the next village should go and break it up. So, when Wicken Feast came round the Soham men went over and very soon stalls would be upset, dancers scattered and a grand free-for-all wrestling match would be in full swing. Wicken men, in their turn, would descend on Soham and Burwell Feasts, where the same lively fights would break out. Similar scenes occurred in many villages.

In 1812 was born in Weston Colville, of poor parents, James Reynolds Withers. Too poor to send him to school, his mother taught him to read, and when, at the age of 12, he started work for a wage of 7s. a week, he spent some of this on penny numbers of Shakespeare.

In 1840 he moved to Fordham² and began to write verses which attracted the attention of Mrs R. Dillamore Fyson of Fordham, who sent them to Cambridge to be published. Among his poems is one

¹ Information from Dr R. Wortley in 1966.

² Some of his descendants still live in Fordham; his old home there is known as Poet's Cottage.

entitled *My Native Village* which contains the following account of the feast at Weston Colville :

Just down the road, beside the bowling green,
The weather-beaten signpost still is seen;
No artist's labour could the host afford,
But three hot horse-shoes branded on the board.
Here once a year at what was called the fair—
Though horse were never bought nor cows sold there—
Here met the village youths on pleasure bent,
And the long-hoarded halfpence freely spent.
The stalls were boards placed on a barrel's head,
With cakes and sweets and penny whistles spread.
In the old parlour was the rustic ball,
Shone on by candles stuck against the wall;
While on the grass plot was the crowded ring
Where wrestlers tugged, each tried his man to fling
And youth feels proud when age his skill approves,
Pleased by sore legs to win a pair of gloves.
In the old kitchen by the chimney wide,
With foaming mugs in good stone jugs supplied,
The old folks talked of times when they were young,
And the same songs, year after year, were sung;
'Lord Bateman', 'Spanking Jack' and 'Black-eyed Sue',
'Will Watch' and 'Crazy Jane' and 'Bonnets Blue'.
'Twas here the jolly hostess sat and smiled,
Whilst on the ample grate the logs were piled;
Here was the roasting jack with wheels and weights,
And on the dresser shone the pewter plates.

5

The World of Magic

Ghosts

The Ghosts of Abbey House,¹ Cambridge

The Augustinian Priory² of Barnwell, originally founded in 1098 at Castle End in Cambridge, was removed in 1112 to a new site extending from the Newmarket road to the river in the then village of Barnwell. In 1539, the Priory, with all its revenues, had to surrender to Henry VIII, and soon afterwards the contents of the great range of buildings, together with roof tiles, windows, glass and ironwork were sold. The site itself was granted to Lord Clinton, from whom it passed to various owners and then to the Chicheley family of Arrington and Wimpole, who gave it, in 1659, to Alexander Butler in exchange for an estate in Urwell.

By this time little of the Priory remained and so, on part of the site, Butler built a house subsequently known as The Old Abbey House or Abbey House, his son Alexander adding to it in 1678, which date is still on the gable.

Below the ground floor are vaulted cellars with one arch which is now bricked up. Local tradition has long held this arch to be the entrance to an underground tunnel which is said to run from the house to Jesus College, formerly the Benedictine Nunnery of St Radegund. For this reason, together with the eccentricities of the last Butler³ to live there, Abbey House, sheltered behind high walls and conspicuous by its age among the Victorian villas which now

¹ Plate 28.

² The Priory has for long erroneously been styled an Abbey.

³ See under *Narratives and Traditions: Jacob Butler*.

surround it, has always had a somewhat sinister reputation, apart from that which it has acquired through its ghosts.

Since the end of the last century the house has often been inhabited by two or sometimes three families simultaneously, living side by side. From *c.* 1904 until 1910 the greater part of it was occupied by a Fellow of Pembroke College and his family and it is during these years that detailed accounts of the ghosts begin. A woman in long robes like those of a nun was often seen by members of the family as she passed through one room in the house and vanished into the panelled wall. She was already¹ known to haunt the house and was named locally 'The Grey Lady'; tradition held that she had been, in her lifetime, a nun of St Radegund's who came regularly through the underground passage from her convent to meet her lover, one of the Canons of Barnwell.

The children of the family living in the house from 1904 became used to seeing the Grey Lady and, apparently, were not frightened by her, although they did not 'like her very much'. She often came into their rooms after they had gone to bed. Succeeding occupants of the house were also used to seeing her and Abbey House continued to be feared, especially by those who had to pass by it at night.

During the Second World War a young naval officer came to Cambridge to attend a wedding and stayed with the people then living in the end of the house where the Grey Lady appeared. Going downstairs on the first morning of his visit his hostess was surprised to see the young man, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, half asleep in a chair in the large hall always used as a sitting-room. On being asked why he had got up so early he replied:

'I've been here since three o'clock; I couldn't stand it up there and, if you don't mind, I'll have to find a hotel for tonight—I just couldn't face another night in that room of yours. I was fast asleep, you see, when I was suddenly woken up by my bed being violently shaken, and I could see someone standing at the foot. At first I thought it was you—I thought you might have come to tell me I'd been recalled from leave or something—or perhaps you were ill. Anyway, when I switched on my torch I could see it wasn't you but a younger woman in a long greyish cloak with a hood over her head. Then she suddenly left off shaking the bed and walked over to the wall and just went clean into it. That was quite enough for me—I just grabbed my dressing gown and came down here.'²

¹ A Cambridge lady who died in 1960, aged 88, occupied the north end of the house from 1904 to 1911. She said in 1948 that she already knew of the ghost when she first went to live in Abbey House.

² Related in 1950 by a visitor to Cambridge who knew the people concerned in the story.

Two single women who shared the same part of the house in the 1950s never saw the Grey Lady, but from time to time some odd things would occur. On several occasions one of the occupants, sleeping in a small room leading from the 'haunted' room, was woken up by her bedclothes being roughly turned back, although, when she turned on the light, no one was in the room. Sometimes objects—a book, a pen, knitting—would be found elsewhere than where they had been left. So often did this happen that a careful check was made by the two friends to make sure that neither one nor the other had moved the article in question. Their cat and dog were obviously, as has already been described,¹ affected by the house. Since 1959, however, all has been normal; the Grey Lady has not been seen and nothing untoward has been reported.

The Grey Lady is not the only ghost to have been seen in the house; the family living there between 1904 and 1910 had an even stranger visitor. This was a furry animal which walked on its hind legs and had flipper-like front paws and a long beak. The youngest child saw it first—and was not alarmed by it—then the older children on subsequent occasions and finally the parents. Then the creature was seen elsewhere in Cambridge, in Merton Hall, an old house at the junction of Queen's Road and Northampton Street, quite a long way from Abbey House. The occupants of the Hall at that time were Roman Catholics and during the Pax Romana Conference held in Cambridge in 1924 several priests stayed in the house and Mass was said there daily. From that time the animal was not seen there again, but later the wife of a College don, a Scotswoman gifted with second sight, saw it playing in fields by the Madingley Road.²

Portrait of a Ghost

Some time in the 1890s a house in Trumpington Street in Cambridge was for sale. A lady coming one day to look over it, with a view to purchasing it, was shown by the servant into a sitting-room on the ground floor. As the lady sat there waiting for the owner of the house to arrive her attention was caught by a portrait hanging over the fireplace. It was that of a woman in vivid green dress and cloak and wearing a curiously shaped hat with a red feather in it. The colours of the portrait were striking enough, but more striking still was the odd, somewhat sinister expression on the woman's face.

¹ See under *Folklore of Animals*.

² The information concerning the furry animal seen in Abbey House and Merton Hall was supplied by Mr John Saltmarsh, M.A., Fellow of King's College, in 1966.

The visitor was still looking at the portrait when the maid returned to take her to her mistress. After a short conversation the prospective purchaser was shown over the house and, the two ladies having returned to the drawing-room, said that she liked the house very much and would most probably buy it. Somewhat hesitantly the owner said:

'I think you ought to know that there is a silly story that the house is haunted. I hope this will not affect your decision; certainly we have not experienced anything unusual since we have lived here.'

Asked what form the haunting was supposed to take, she said that once or twice people visiting the house had seen, or thought they had seen, the ghost of a woman dressed in bright green with an oddly shaped hat with a red feather in it.

'Oh,' said the visitor, 'you mean the woman whose portrait is hanging over the mantelpiece in the room I was shown into when I arrived.'

'Portrait?' was the reply. 'There is *no* portrait in that room: come and see.'

Sure enough, when they went back into the room the only picture over the fireplace was a country landscape in water-colours.¹

A Haunting Smell

In 1950 a married ex-service undergraduate, with his wife and 2-year-old daughter, occupied for a few months rooms² over a shop in Magdalene Street, Cambridge. Soon after they arrived the mother noticed, on several evenings after the child had been put to bed, a smell of burning in the sitting-room on the first floor. Thinking that she might have left a cigarette end still alight she went carefully round the room on each occasion, but found nothing. Out on the landing the smell seemed stronger and curiously heavy and scented, so she ran upstairs into the child's bedroom, but here again everything seemed in order. After a quarter of an hour or so the smell gradually disappeared.

¹ From an account by Thos. Thornley which appeared in *The Cam: A Cambridge Town Magazine*, No. 2, Feb. 1927. This magazine ran to only six issues. The narrative is said by Thornley to have been received 'as true' from a friend.

² These rooms have since been largely altered and reconstructed by Magdalene College. In May 1967 information was received from an employee in an office over a Magdalene Street shop not far from the scene of this story. The informant said that a colleague, working late one evening, had reported seeing the ghost of an elderly man. On request, a description of the man was obtained: it coincided with the appearance of a former occupant of the premises who committed suicide there in the 1950s. The man and the event were totally unknown to the informant and her colleague, neither of whom was living in Cambridge at that time.

Inquiries made in the neighbourhood as to whether former occupants of the rooms had ever noticed the smell, brought from an elderly man in Northampton Street, who died in 1958, a possible explanation. He had been told that many years ago a man who worked as a lighterman on the river used to lodge in the rooms whenever he was waiting for work. He used to smoke opium which he obtained from the docks in King's Lynn.

Disturbances in a Cambridge House

In 1951 a newly married couple, looking for furnished rooms, were given the address of a house on the west side of Cambridge where a sitting-room and bedrooms were available with the use of a shared kitchen.

When they went to see the rooms they found they were in a seemingly ordinary brick-and-tile house, built towards the end of the last century, which the occupants, a young man and his wife, had rented furnished for the past twelve or thirteen months.

The applicants were shown the rooms and said they would take them. To their surprise, however, the owner seemed a little unwilling to let them, giving as an excuse that, as his wife was expecting a child in a few weeks' time, the would-be tenants might not like to be disturbed by a baby crying at night. He was assured that this would make no difference.

'Well,' he said, 'I don't deny we do really want to let the rooms—the money would be useful to us just now with the extra expense of the baby—but at the same time it wouldn't be fair not to let you know that there's something odd about this place and it's got on my wife's nerves. We wouldn't find it easy to get anywhere else to live with the baby coming, so I thought if there was someone else in the house it might be company for Jean during the day when I'm out at work. But such queer things happen—and they seem to be getting worse—that perhaps it's not fair to expect anyone else to live here. It's only downstairs that's affected, not the rooms you'd have, but you'll be using the kitchen and that's where the things happen.'

'But what does happen?' he was asked.

'Well, it's as if there's someone in the house we can't see who throws things about or moves them. We'll be sitting here in the evening, for instance, listening to the wireless and suddenly the corner of the carpet will be turned back or a vase of flowers goes sliding across the table and on to the floor, just as if it had been pushed. Sometimes a vase has fallen off the mantelpiece without either Jean or I touching it—we've had two broken like that and unfortunately one of them belonged to the landlord. We were having a cup of coffee one evening and the sugar basin on the tray suddenly bounced off on to the floor.'

'Yes,' added the wife, 'and two days ago I was sitting here one afternoon on my own, doing some knitting, and I felt like someone pulled the needle out of my hand—the right one; there it was on the floor and all the stitches off, and I didn't drop the needle. I'm sure there was someone there who tugged at it. But it's worse in the kitchen. Cups have jumped off the hooks in the pantry and saucepans have come clattering down or a jug of milk has toppled over on its own and spilt. And we can't blame the traffic because this is a quiet road. I tell you, it's really got on my nerves and there's nothing I'd like more than to get away from the house.'¹

The Black Lady of Sidney Street

At No. 15 Sidney Street, Cambridge, stood until 1924² an old house behind a stone entrance gateway which bore the arms of the De la Pryme family. Professor George Pryme, Professor of Political Economy, bought the property in 1820 and recorded in his *Autobiographic Recollections*:³

It was a large remnant of the Trinity Hostel which, with many others of the like kind, were superseded by colleges. . . . At first it seemed as if it would be impossible to remain there, for our servants believed in a rumour that the house was haunted, and for some time we had a difficulty in persuading them to remain, till at length the ghost was laid by ourselves occupying the room in which the 'black lady' was said to walk.

(The foundation of the belief was that a skeleton had been dug up in former years in the garden, but this was easily accounted for by the fact of the house having been once occupied by Sir Busick Harwood, Professor of Anatomy. Editor's note.)⁴

College Ghosts: St John's College

On Staircase O in the second court of St John's College the ghostly figure of an eighteenth-century undergraduate is reputed to have been seen on several occasions. The figure is that of Dr James Wood (1760–1839), who, as a student, occupied a garret off this staircase. Too poor to afford a fire or even a light in his room he used to study in the evenings, his feet wrapped in straw to protect them from the cold, by the light of the rush candle which lit the stairs. A brilliant

¹ Information received in 1951 from the young couple who applied for the rooms. They did not take them. Subsequent inquiries made six weeks later revealed that the occupants of the house had left a fortnight before. The wife was said by neighbours to 'have had a nervous breakdown and gone to her mother's in London to have the baby'.

² The building was purchased by Messrs Sainsbury, whose grocery store now occupies the site.

³ Published in 1870, pp. 140–1.

⁴ Prof. Pryme's daughter.

man, his mathematical works were for long the standard textbooks of the University. He eventually became a Fellow and Tutor of the College and Master in 1815. At the time of his death he was also Archdeacon of Ely and Rector of Freshwater in the Isle of Wight. He is remembered with gratitude by St John's for the gifts of money and books which, in his later prosperity, he gave and bequeathed to the College.

Trinity College

T. C. Lethbridge has related¹ a curious incident which occurred in 1922 when he was at Trinity College. After sitting late one evening with a friend who kept a set of rooms in New Court he was just getting up to leave when the door opened and a man wearing a top-hat came in, walked a few paces forward and then stood resting his hands on the table in the middle of the room. Thinking it was one of the College porters who wanted to speak to his friend, Mr Lethbridge went away. Next morning he asked his friend why the porter had come and received the reply: 'What porter? No one came in.' Looking back over the incident Mr Lethbridge remembered that the porters wore top-hats only on Sundays and the evening had not been a Sunday. Moreover, instead of a black tie the man who came in had had something white round his neck—he was, in fact, in hunting dress. As only one of the two occupants of the room had seen him he could only have been a ghost.

Jesus College

A room in Jesus College is known as the Ghost Room. The ghost which allegedly haunts it is an example of fiction providing the basis of what later came to be accepted as fact. Arthur Gray, when Master of the College, published in 1922, under the pseudonym of *Ingulphus*, a small volume entitled *Tedious Brief Tales of Granta and Gramarye*, a collection of seemingly authentic historical narratives such as might have been written by his namesake, Ingulphus the chronicler of Crowland Abbey. One of the tales dealt with the Everlasting Club supposedly founded in the College, in the tradition of the notorious Hellfire Club, in the eighteenth century. It gave a vivid account of the last meeting which was attended by the sole surviving member of the group, one Charles Bellassis.² Throughout the night terrifying sounds of drunken revelry were heard and when, next morning,

¹ *Ghost and Ghoul*, 1961.

² This name was evidently chosen to add apparent authenticity to the tale. A Charles Bellassis was a member of the College, but in the seventeenth century.

members of the College found courage to enter the room Bellassis lay there dead.

Dr F. C. Brittain, Fellow of the College, believes that the story was originally read by the author to some undergraduates in 1910 or 1911. One who heard it had a typed copy, now in Dr Brittain's possession, on the margin of which he wrote: 'This story is so well told that in a century to come it will probably be accepted as a very old-established ghost story of the College, or even as a genuine one.' When Dr Brittain came up to Cambridge in 1919 a few men, he says, accepted the story as genuine, while others certainly thought that the legend had been attached to the room for a very long time. Although the book has long been out of print the story is still known to undergraduates and is commonly accepted by them as a very old one.

Corpus Christi College

The ghost which has been said to haunt upper rooms in a corner of the Old Court of Corpus, above the kitchens, has been identified either with Dr Butts, Master of the College from 1626 to 1632, or with the suitor of the daughter of a later Master, Dr Spencer, 1630 to 1693.

Dr Butts was Vice-Chancellor in 1630 during the time of the Plague and in a long letter to Lord Coventry, High Steward of Cambridge, he described the pitiful plight of the town and the heavy responsibilities he bore at such a time.

Myself am alone a destitute and forsaken man not a Scholler with me in College, not a Scholler seen by me without.¹

It may well be that his experiences affected his mind, for, in 1632, just before he was due to preach the University Sermon on Easter Sunday he was found hanging by his garters in his room.

Dr Spencer's daughter is said to have been interrupted during a secret meeting with her lover, who, according to tradition, hid in a cupboard in the College kitchen and died there of suffocation.

Which of these two ghosts haunted the rooms, or whether it was indeed one of these, certainly in the 1880s no servant cared to remain in the College kitchens at night.² Then in 1904 a curious incident occurred which was described in an article in the *Occult Review* of March 1905:

In the Easter term of 1904, an undergraduate . . . who had rooms opposite those said to be haunted, happened to come in at three o'clock

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 128.

² J. P. T. Bury: *Corpus Christi College*, 1952.

in the afternoon, and as soon as he had sat down to do some work, found himself seized with a curious feeling of uneasiness, which made it impossible for him to concentrate his mind. He got up and, looking out of the window, noticed the head and shoulders of a man leaning out of a window of the upper set of the rooms opposite. The features, he was rather surprised to find, he could not recognise: they were those of a stranger with long hair, who remained perfectly motionless, and seemed to glare down upon him. For three minutes he stood at the window and watched, and then, thinking he might see better from his bedroom, he ran there, but by the time he had arrived, the man opposite had completely disappeared. The young man was now thoroughly excited and went across the court to the upper set of rooms opposite. However, he found the door locked, and when he called no answer was given. In the evening, after careful enquiry he discovered that the owner of the rooms had been out the whole afternoon, and that it was quite impossible that anyone could have been in the rooms from the time of his departure at two o'clock to the arrival of his bedmaker at half-past six.

After the apparition had been seen again on subsequent occasions the occupier of the rooms

made up his mind to try to exorcise it, and got C—, a friend from another College, who was interested in spiritualism, to come to his rooms for the purpose, with four other men.

At the outset they all knelt down, said the Lord's Prayer, and called upon the Three Persons of the Trinity to command the spirit to appear. It was then seen, but by only two of the six men. Another said that he felt a peculiarly cold and chilling air, but the rest saw nothing. The two who saw the ghost—the man interested in spiritualism and the occupant of the rooms—describe it as appearing in the form of a mist of about a yard wide, which slowly developed into the form of a man who seemed to be shrouded in white, and had a gash in his neck; that it then moved slowly about the room. The two men got up, and, holding the crucifix in front of them, approached the apparition, but seemed to be forced back by some invisible agency. They cried out, 'It drives me back', and then both completely broke down, becoming quite unnerved.

A few days later they tried again to exorcise the spirit, with exactly the same result; the same men saw it, and no one else. They were again driven back, although this time they approached holding hands. The others allege that they appeared to grow stiff, and that they gripped one another convulsively. The meeting was again broken up without anything definite having been effected.

A Horseheath Ghost

A ghost allegedly haunted Money Lane in Horseheath. It is a local tradition that a former occupant of Limbery's¹ once hid some money in the lane and that since his death he returns from time to time to

¹ A farmhouse at the east end of the village. The Limbery family held one of the Horseheath Manors in the fourteenth century.

look for his treasure or to see that it is still there. It is said that anyone passing down the lane on a night of full moon is liable to be hailed with the command: 'Pick up your spade and follow me', but no one has been so brave as to obey.¹

Ghosts in Harston

Members of Harston Women's Institute recorded in 1935 the existence of the ghost of the White Lady who walked from the Queen's Head along to Mill Road. The ghost of a woman was said by these same members to have been seen in the past throwing herself into the river near the bridge towards Hasling field.

Twice within their memory the ghost of a woman had been seen in an old house in the High Street of the village, a house where, on several occasions, furniture had mysteriously moved of its own accord. In 1915 a maid, returning from her half-day off, found that she had left her key in her room. Although she knew that her employers were out and that the house was empty, she peered hopefully through the drawing-room window and saw an unknown woman sitting there. The maid called out to her and asked to be let in, but the stranger refused to open the door.

On several occasions the owner of the house had heard a woman's voice coming from one of the rooms when he knew that no one but himself was at home. The house was partly demolished in the early 1930s and from that time no untoward incident had occurred.

A Ghost and a Murder at Steeple Morden

In Steeple Morden, on Cheyney Water, used to stand some cottages, now in ruins, which had once formed the old farmhouse known as Moco.² In one of these, at the turn of this century, lived a gamekeeper and his wife. One night they were disturbed by strange noises as if a woman was crying out in pain, and fearfully going to discover what was wrong they saw a shadowy figure of a young girl in a white cap and old-fashioned dress, crying bitterly and wringing her hands in distress. Then she disappeared. The next night and again the next the same noise was heard and the same figure seen, so that, unable to endure staying in the house any longer, the gamekeeper and his wife took refuge with their next-door neighbour.

Meanwhile the story of the ghost spread through the village and the old folk remembered the tale of the packman who had disappeared many years before and of the murdered maidservant whose tomb was

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institute, 1954.

² On an 1840 Award Map of the parish appears the name *Mocha Field*.

in the churchyard, and they knew that it was this girl who had come back to the old farmhouse where she had been killed.

This had happened a hundred and fifty or so years before. The packman used regularly to visit Steeple Morden with his wares, staying always at the Moco farmhouse. One year he came as usual—villagers saw him enter the village and go into the farm—but to their surprise he did not appear in the street next morning, as was his custom, to sell the trinkets and other trifles from his pack. He was, in fact, never seen again, but it was noticed that the well in front of the Moco farmhouse was, from that day, never used and was eventually filled in, so the people of Steeple Morden were sure that the packman had been murdered and that his body had been thrown into the well.

Working as a servant at the farm at the time was a girl named Elizabeth Pateman. One day, shortly after the packman had so mysteriously vanished, the farmer overheard the girl telling her sweetheart that next time she came to see her she would have a secret to tell him. Thinking that she knew the secret of the packman's death, the farmer and his wife murdered her. She is buried in Steeple Morden churchyard. On her tomb were carved¹ the implements used in her killing—a peahook, a knife and a coulter²—together with these lines:

Here lies interred a harmless maid
By cruel hands to death betrayed
And though the murder is concealed
On earth, in Heaven it is revealed.

And they who did it soon shall know
The righteous Judge sees all below
Therefore repent who ere you be
Or I foretell your destiny.

In hell's hot furnace dark and deep
Your wretched soul shall wail and weep
While she I hope in Heaven high
Shall reign above the lofty sky.

Sacred to the memory of Elizabeth Pateman, a maidservant, who was murdered at Moco in her 19th year and interred in the Parish Church of Steeple Morden on 21st February 1734.³

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institute, 1956.

² *Coulter*: alt. *Colter*: the iron blade fixed in front of the share in a plough; it cuts the soil vertically. *O.E.D.*

³ A plain tombstone now marks the grave. This copy of the verses on the old stone was kindly provided in 1966 by the Rev. J. L. Carré, Vicar of Steeple and Guilden Morden.

Witchcraft

Cambridge

Reception for any persons apprehended under the Witchcraft Acts of 1563 and 1604 was provided in Cambridge in part of the gaol in the Tolbooth which then occupied part of the site of the present Guildhall. In the Town Treasurers' Accounts for the year ended Michaelmas 1619 we read:

Item, to Ireland Mason for mendinge the witches gaole x^s x^d

That this 'witches gaole' was merely a part of the ordinary felons' quarters is shown by the entry in the Treasurers' Accounts for 1620:

For amendinge the particion between the Witches gaole & the other
fellons gaole xvij^s

Further repairs were needed in 1623 when 'a locke for the dore of y^e witches gaiole' cost 2s. 4d.

In 1579 there was an execution in Cambridge of two women found guilty of association with the Devil:

two were hanged in Cambridge, mother and daughter, the mother said the devil had been true to her for three score years and she would not renounce him; the daughter died penitent.¹

Another execution took place in 1645 when 'a woman was hanged at Cambridge for keeping a tame frog and it was sworn to be her imp'.² She may have been the same woman to whom Bowtell refers in his MSS.³ as 'the wife of one Lendale was hanged on Jesus Green for witchcraft', and whom John Stearne⁴ described as 'one Lendall of Cambridge' who 'carried herself at her execution like a saint'.

It was a Cambridge physician, Dr Barrow, who, with William Butler⁵ of Clare Hall, was called in by Robert Throckmorton of Warboys in Huntingdonshire in 1589 to diagnose the illness from which his daughter Jane was suffering. Barrow, having examined the girl, gave it as his opinion that her fits were caused by witchcraft, of which he had some experience. His judgement helped to set in train

¹ W. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 372.

² *op. cit.*, III, 398.

³ MS. *History of the Town of Cambridge* (Downing Coll. Lib.).

⁴ *Discovery of Witchcraft*, 1648.

⁵ William Butler (1536-1618) was granted a licence by the University to practise medicine, though he never took the degree of Doctor of Medicine. He was often consulted by James I when the King was visiting Newmarket or elsewhere near Cambridge.

the famous trial of the three Warboys witches who were eventually convicted and hanged.

Cambridge dons contributed by their writings to the maintenance and encouragement of witch beliefs in the period of the great persecutions, as did also the University Press by printing their works. From the Press came in 1590 Henry Holland's *Treatise against Witchcraft: or a Dialogue wherein the greatest doubts concerning that sin are briefly answered: a Sathanicall operation in the Witchcraft of all times is truly proved: very needful to be known of all men, but chiefly of Masters and Fathers of families &c.* Holland was a Master of Arts of Magdalene College and before going to London to be Vicar of St Bride's was Vicar of the Cambridgeshire village of Orwell.

A firm believer in the actuality of witchcraft was Henry More (1614-87), a Fellow of Christ's College and leader of the Cambridge Platonists. His book *An Antidote to Atheism* was published in 1653. He personally questioned a girl who had been accused of witchcraft in Cambridge and heard from her a lurid tale of a devils' assembly which he accepted as truth, since it confirmed 'what we heard from four or five witches which we lately examined before'. He similarly accepted as proof of the reality of witches the most fantastic accounts provided by alleged eyewitnesses including the one concerning 'Old Strangridge of Cambridge who was carried over Shelford steeple on the back of a black Hog and tore his breeches on the weathercock'.

In 1608 the University Press printed William Perkins's *Discourse upon the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, six years after the author's death. Perkins, a Fellow of Christ's College and a Puritan, was convinced that witches were in league with the Devil and that death was the only fitting punishment for them.

Some Cambridge writers were more sceptical of witchcraft and demonology. One of these was Samuel Harsnett, Master of Pembroke Hall from 1605 to 1616 and later Archbishop of York. In the 1590s, as Chaplain to the Bishop of London, he investigated the case of John Darrell, B.A., a Puritan minister who was charged before the High Commissioners with pretending to cast out evil spirits and who was suspended and imprisoned. Harsnett published in 1599 his *Discovery of the Fraudulent Practices of John Darrell*, in which he called Darrell a grand imposter and juggler; in reply Darrell wrote two books in self-defence. Some copies of these were sent to William Bradshaw, a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, who had them distributed in Cambridge through a local tailor named Underwood. The Vice-Chancellor, hearing of this, wrote to the Bishop of London telling him that Underwood had disposed of sixty copies, but refused

to give the names of the purchasers, though he had revealed who had supplied him with the books. The Bishop wrote in reply:

I wolde wish you took souch ordre with the Fellowe that spread them as by lawe you have in that place & keep him in Prison until he shall be content to be examined upon his othe.¹

Bradshaw escaped from Cambridge with the assistance of the Master of Sidney Sussex, who had himself bought one of the books.

Although the physicians Philip and William Butler had pronounced Jane Throckmorton to have been bewitched, not all Cambridge doctors attributed strange illnesses to supernatural causes, even in the period when the witch mania was at its height. In 1604 a man named Knightley was accused of bewitching two young women and was committed to the custody of the Under Sheriff of Cambridge. A letter was sent by the Privy Council to the Vice-Chancellor of the University, the Provost of King's College and the Heads of Queens' College and Trinity College stating that His Majesty James I was anxious to know whether the girls' illness was caused by witchcraft or not. The University authorities were therefore asked to arrange for the two girls to be examined by 'skilfull Phisitions and learned Devines', but because 'where there are so many young men diverse out of Novelty may be desirous to see them' the girls were to be placed in 'the homes of some Townesmen' and no one was to be allowed to see them without authority from the Vice-Chancellor.

The two young women were duly examined by physicians who later wrote to the Chancellor of the University, the Earl of Salisbury, that 'very confidentlie and assuredlie they pronounce the disease though somewhat Strange & extraordinarie & of much difficultie to be cured, yet to be naturall'. The girls were thereupon dispatched to their own homes by order of the King and a sum of £80 was paid to the University to cover their expenses.²

The reputation of practising witchcraft in Cambridge in modern times seems to have been acquired by old or elderly women who were consulted as fortune-tellers or as advisers on medical matters. At the end of the eighteenth century a 'wise woman' lived in Falcon Yard; at the end of the nineteenth there was a so-called witch—more probably a fortune-teller—in Gloucester Street. She was visited one evening, *c.* 1895, by two workmen, one of whom, on the way to the house, said to his companion: 'I wonder what the old b— will have to say to us.' When she opened her door the woman greeted them with the words:

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 601.

² C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, III, 13-14.

‘You’ll soon know what the old b— has to say to you, and she’ll tell you everything you’ve said as you were coming here.’¹

Early in the present century an old woman, who confessed to having practised witchcraft in her younger days, lived in a Cambridge almshouse. She was visited by a local wood turner who ‘tested’ her by giving her food which contained an infinitesimal quantity of salt. It was immediately rejected.²

Bartlow

An account of a witch who lived in Bartlow during the First World War was recorded in 1938³ from two Cambridge sisters.

She would overlook potatoes and pigs if not given some or was not well treated. She kept a cage of white mice which were her familiars. The office of witch was a permanent one in the village and she was left the mice by her predecessor and would, in her turn, pass them on. The previous witch had been buried at the cross roads and there is a bump now where the grave is. A certain farmer intended to move house—I think he had offended the present witch and wanted to get away from her, she seemed to have put some kind of ill-luck on him. But when the furniture van got to the cross roads it broke down by the grave.

Burwell

Old Judy, the witch of Burwell, was described in *The Antiquary* of November 1888:

Old Judy lived in the Squatters’ Cottages on the fen side of the Weirs, half a dozen primitive one-storeyed hovels built of wattle and daub with clunch⁴ chimneys and thatched with sedge and litter. There lived a little colony of typical fenmen, tall big men, with very black hair, sallow and swarthy-skinned, of rough manners and gruff speech . . . Old Judy lived in the most northerly cottage and was credited with every kind of witchcraft. A great pit of about one and a half acres of water nearby is still called Judy’s Hole, and the following verse is of her:

A wicked old crone
Who lived all alone
In a hut beside the reeds,
With a high-crowned hat
And a black tom-cat,
Whose looks were as black as her deeds.

¹ Similar stories have been recorded from Ely, Sawston and elsewhere in the county.

² Information from Mr L. F. Newman.

³ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

⁴ *Clunch*: a soft limestone formerly widely used in the county for church and domestic building.

Ely

Mr L. F. Newman heard from an Ely solicitor in the 1930s the following anecdotes which were corroborated by a member of the Ely City Council:

An Ely man saw a witch drifting down the Cam. She shouted out to him a terrible prophecy of some misfortune which he could avoid if he would speak of it to a friend. When in company, however, he could never remember what she had said, and he died soon afterwards.

An Ely man consulted a local witch who gave him the information he required with the additional fact that he would not be able to remember it until he had heard the bells of Great St Mary's Church in Cambridge ring three times.

John Stearn, one of Matthew Hopkins's¹ assistants, gave evidence on 24 July 1647 that, having examined Thomas Pie of Ely, he had found

two markes upon (his) body, sucked or drawn by evill or familiar spirr'ts call'd imps & by th'experience he hath in searchinge of others who have confess'd themselves guilty, whose marks being compar'd are alike.²

Haddenham

On May 29, 1647, Thomason Read of Haddenham was examined by Thomas Castell, one of the Justices of the Peace for the Isle of Ely. Thomason said that seven years before a large mouse had suddenly appeared before her and she knew it was the Devil. It had pricked her on the thigh and had drawn blood from her body every day until three days before her examination. She had made a contract with the Devil, who had asked her to kill her own child, which she had refused to do. He had then asked her spirit mouse to bewitch the young son of John Miller and the child had suffered great torment as a result. She confessed, too, to having another spirit in the form of a cat which she had ordered to worry some sheep belonging to Thomas Woodbridge and Robert Gray because they had dismissed her son from their employment as ploughboy and had taken on another boy.

¹ Hopkins was the son of a Suffolk clergyman. In 1654 he set himself up as witch finder and, with his assistant John Stearne, was active first in Essex and then, with four other assistants, one a woman, in Hunts., Beds., and Northants. On at least one occasion he sent Stearne into Cambs. Hopkins's methods of torture became suspect and in the summer of 1646 he retired to Manningtree; Stearne, too, thought it wiser to retire to his home in Bury St Edmunds. Hopkins and Stearne became rich through the fees they charged for detecting persons practising witchcraft (e.g. they were paid £23 for a visit to Stowmarket, Suffolk), and were responsible for the hanging of probably several hundred witches in the E. Counties. The exact figure is, however, unknown, because records are incomplete or have not been preserved.

² Ely Diocesan Records (Gaol Delivery Rolls, E.5) (Univ. Lib. Camb.).

Confirmatory evidence was given by John Miller, Robert Gray and Thomas Woodbridge. In addition Robert Miller said that on one occasion Thomason had given him a white root to eat, since when he had been in great pain and misery.¹

Earlier, in 1615², another Haddenham woman, Dorothy Pitman, widow, had been examined on the charge of witchcraft. Evidence was given that Dorothy had, eighteen months before, quarrelled in the street with her daughter, Ann, and had threatened to have her blood. Ann bit two of her mother's fingers before her husband arrived on the scene and dragged his wife away saying: 'Come away, for she is a witch and hath been for twenty years.'

The quarrel was heard by Elizabeth Steward, who lost no time in telling her neighbours of it, whereupon Dorothy Pitman declared she would 'be even with her before seven years went about'. A few months later Elizabeth's baby was taken ill and died.

Dorothy's son-in-law said that his wife, Ann, had been taken ill three or four years before and he thought she had been bewitched by her mother, but Ann gave evidence that, although she had indeed been sick for about seven weeks, she had never thought she had been bewitched.

Horseheath

In 1915 the late Miss Catherine Parsons of Horseheath gave a lecture³ to the Cambridge Antiquarian Society on the witch beliefs and practices, past and present, of that village. She admitted to 'considerable difficulty' in collecting the beliefs which still remained, 'owing to the dread, even to this day, of offending the parish witch, to whom everybody must be extremely courteous'.

She found that the earliest witch remembered in Horseheath went by the name of Daddy Witch.

It is said she was an ancient bony creature, half-clothed in rags, who lived in a hut by the sheep-pond in Garret's Close, and that she gained most of her knowledge from a book called *The Devil's Plantation*. When Daddy Witch died, her body was buried in the middle of the road which leads from Horseheath to Horseheath Green. . . . Her grave is marked by the dryness of the road, said to be caused by the heat of her body.

A Horseheath woman recorded in 1935 in the Women's Institute Scrapbook that 'to have good luck you must nod your head nine times before passing over the grave'. In July of that year a fire spreading

¹ *ibid.*

² Ely Diocesan Records (Examinations, etc., F. 10) (Univ. Lib. Camb.).

³ Subsequently printed in the Society's *Proceedings*, vol. XIX, 1915.

along the road stopped when it reached the grave, turned and went over the fields.

Horseheath was notorious for the imps possessed by its witches. 'Their present owner', said Miss Parsons in 1915, 'who came from Castle Camps received them from her sister.' Their names were Bonnie, Blue Cap, Red Cap, Jupiter and Venus, and most of the villagers thought they resembled white mice. The imps were, apparently, useful to their owners for spying on the villagers' movements.

We have heard how Mr E. the late rag and bone man of Horseheath, was asked one day by the witch where he was going and how he told the old lady to mind her own business. Before this man got half a mile from his home he heard something coming along in the hedge behind him and on looking to see what it was, he discovered an imp had been sent by the witch to watch his movements. Mr E. chased the imp back and tried to catch it, but the faster he ran the faster the imp ran, till at last it reached its owner who, standing in the doorway of her cottage, quickly caught the creature up and put it in her bosom.

Witches' imps are traditionally difficult to dispose of; they must be passed on to a relation before their owner can die. Miss Parsons heard that, early in this century, when the witch at West Wickham wanted to die, she put her imps into a hot oven, but they screamed so loudly that they had to be taken out. They were returned to the old lady, who was, herself, covered with burns, while the imps remained unharmed. They were eventually buried with her in the churchyard. The death of the Horseheath witch in 1926 was reported in the Sunday Press, which gave an account of how her imps were delivered by a black man to one of the villagers.

Horseheath people believed in keeping on the right side of their witch by making her gifts of money or goods. Miss Parsons found that

whenever anything went wrong on the Church Farm a former tenant used to send the witch five shillings, firmly believing that she had been up to some of her pranks. One poor woman, who had made several batches of heavy bread, believed that it was bewitched, so in order to remedy the trouble she sent for the witch, paid her a fee and asked her to break the spell. This we are told she did by burning a piece of heavy dough in the fire, when at once the evil went into the witch's cap which caught fire at the same time as the dough.

Littleport

In 1639 Ann Symes, *alias* Greene, of Littleport was accused of witchcraft. In the August of that year Informations¹ were taken upon oath from several people, all of whom gave to William Marsh, Justice

¹ Ely Diocesan Records (F. 10) (Univ. Lib. Camb.).

of the Peace, long and highly involved accounts of the various *maleficia* of the accused woman. For the sake of clarity their accusations have been condensed.

On August 7th John Dashfield, Vicar of Littleport, testified that Ann Symes had, four or five years before, bewitched his baby daughter to death. He knew that she was reputed to be a witch and that she had 'a fleshe Teate' on her body which her daughter, Agnes Veeres, had cut off with scissors and thrown into the fire.

The Vicar's wife, Ann Dashfield, testified that her husband had allotted to Ann Symes a seat in the parish church, but that later he had given it to a newly married woman. She had begged her husband not to do this, for if he did 'the Cheilde in her Armes would die of it'. He had therefore put Ann Symes into another seat, but the accused woman had gone out of the church in a fit of anger and within a month the Dashfield child was taken ill and seven weeks later died 'in great extremitie with her Bowells bound Round together in her bodye'. Ann Dashfield further testified that, when she was lying in bed after the birth of another child, Ann Symes had suddenly appeared in the room, climbed onto the bed and knelt on her (Ann Dashfield's) stomach, since when she had had 'a fyer heat in her bodye.' She had been held down in the bed by the accused woman and 'was almost deade with her ill usage'.

On August 16th Cicely Plumb of Littleport testified that Ann Symes's daughter, Agnes Veeres, had asked her to take her mother into her house 'in the tyme of her trouble'. She had done so, but on the eighth day Ann, being very weak, had fallen to the ground and in so doing had revealed 'one littell piece of fleshe in the likeness of a fleshe teate'. This had alarmed Cicely, who told Agnes Veeres she could no longer keep her mother, as she suspected she was a bad woman. Agnes begged her to say nothing and suggested that they should together cut off the piece of flesh, but she refused to do so.

Rachel Ingram of Ely testified that Ann Symes had told her of how the Vicar had turned her out of her seat in church and that she had sworn to get her revenge. She had told her, too, that she knew people thought she was a witch, whereupon Rachel had told her that 'if she was a witch it were a pyttey but she were burnt' and she herself would spend 'sixpence upon a Witch Barrell to burne her withall.' Soon after this she, Rachel, was taken very ill and she knew that her sickness was caused by Ann Symes.

Further information was given by Gabriel Thompson of Littleport, who said that two years previously Robert Wilson of Littleport had taken a young sorrel mare into the Fen and on returning home the

animal had fallen sick 'in a strange manner, bytinge of the grounde and knairinge of her leggs'. Robert had brought the mare to Gabriel's house and the two men had heated a horseshoe and applied it to the animal's swollen head and lips. While they were doing this Ann Symes had come up 'in a Strange Manner vehemently puffing and blowing with her hand by her sydes'. The following Easter Gabriel Thompson's son was taken ill and died. All these things he attributed to Ann Symes.

Agnes Veeres, the accused woman's daughter, said that she had cut off the piece of flesh from her mother's body and had thrown it into the fire together with hair and urine.

When examined, Ann Symes denied all the accusations, admitting only to the cutting off of the piece of flesh.

W. H. Barrett can recall the fear of witchcraft which prevailed in the Fens between Littleport and Ely and in Brandon Creek until the early years of this century, and many were the tales¹ and anecdotes which he heard repeated about witches. Obviously some of the old women who did not mind acquiring a reputation for practising witchcraft added to their incomes by preying on the superstitions of of their neighbours. One old woman of Brandon Creek in the last century, of whom W. H. Barrett has heard, was in the habit of placing little mounds of silt on people's doorsteps during the night; everyone knew that the silt most probably came from newly dug graves in churchyards away from the peat areas of the Fens. The next morning the woman would arrive at the house, panting and puffing as though she had run a long distance, and swearing that she had seen the Devil putting the silt down. She promised, however, that she would avert his evil power if she were given money with which to placate him, and the householder was only too pleased to hand over a few pence to ward off disaster.

W. H. Barrett's grandmother had many anecdotes to tell about Fenland witches. One of these concerned her own husband when he was a young man. He was a millwright and in about the year 1850 he had to repair the drainage mill near Prickwillow, on a lonely site by the river Lark. As the mill was some distance from his home in Brandon Creek, he spent the working week in the derelict millman's cottage, sleeping in the loft and returning home at week-ends to collect food for the following week.

¹ Several of these are published in his *More Tales from the Fens* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964). Many of the tales told about Fenland witches were deliberately made humorous, probably in order to allay the very real fear of both narrators and listeners.

One night, after he had had his supper out of doors as usual, he climbed the ladder leading to the loft and was soon fast asleep. During the night he was awakened by noises below and, on peering through the trap door in the floor of the loft, he saw two old women preparing to light a fire on the hearth with pieces of wood he had discarded during his work. Wondering what it was all about, he lay face-downwards on the floor and, by the light of the fire as it blazed up, saw four more women open the cottage door and come into the room. One of them he recognised as coming from his own village.

Each of the old women had a rush basket containing food and drink and soon they were all squatting on the floor, eating and drinking. After their meal they sat in a circle, talking in whispers. Presently the room got warm, so they took off their long cloaks, revealing that they had little on beneath them. Round one woman's bare leg was a garter of plaited horsehair, which she proudly showed her companions, one of whom triumphantly displayed her own pair of garters, made, she declared, from a viper's skin. The third woman pointed to her breasts, which were cupped with ferret skin, while the fourth rose from the floor to show that she was dressed in a lambskin chemise.

At this juncture W. H. Barrett's grandfather inadvertently touched the open trap door. It fell with a loud bang, startling the women, who, grabbing their cloaks, ran shrieking from the cottage. The unseen watcher found, next morning, that one of them had left behind her black cloak and rush basket, and these he delivered, the following Saturday, to the old woman from Brandon Creek, who, he knew, was considered by everyone to be a witch. 'Here you are', he said, 'these were left behind by you or your pals the other night in the millman's cottage down in Prickwillow Fen.' The old woman seized the basket and cloak and then, spitting in the young man's face told him that as surely as he lived by making windmills a windmill would finish him off. This did indeed, some years later, come true, for as he was repairing a mill the top collapsed and crushed him to death.

Shortly before she died in 1904, at the age of 90, W. H. Barrett's grandmother told him the following tale:

When I was a gal witches were very real and everybody believed they had the power to do harm. I myself have never seen a witch flying through the air, but I did once see one being dragged across the river because she had bewitched a farmer's wife. She'd told her, you see, that all her children would be born with dog's paws instead of hands and this had so upset the woman that she went clean out of her mind. When her husband knew what had made her like this he was furious and one night he made four of his labourers get hold of the witch,

strip her to her shift and tie her hands and legs together. Then they threw her into the river and dragged her across with a cart rope until she was three parts drowned, when they hauled her out and laid her on the bank, face downwards, to let the water drain out of her. She recovered after a bit and the men were just getting ready to give her another swim when she started begging and pleading for mercy and promising that she would take the curse off the farmer's wife. So they untied her and let her go after she'd promised to be at the farmer's house the next evening, after dark, when they were all to be there, too, to see her take the curse off.

Next morning the old witch, having her own ways of getting things done, ordered the Littleport blacksmith to make her a Trinity Bottle—that's a three-sided one, not a round one—out of sheet iron and she told him that while he was shaping it he was only to heat the iron three times. She stood over him as he worked and before he put the red-hot iron on the anvil she spat on it three times. The sweat poured off him as he shaped the bottle, for the old woman told him that, from start to finish, the job must not take more than three-quarters of an hour; if it did then he would have a cold hearth and a silent anvil because his strength would leave him and for the rest of his life he would be too weak to lift a hammer.

When the bottle was finished the blacksmith was told to take it along to the nearby inn and have it filled with a quart of ale to see that it did not leak. The test showed that all was well, so then he had to drink the ale, emptying the bottle in three long draughts, no more and no less.

That night the witch went to the farmer's house where she found the four labourers, the farmer and his wife all waiting for her. First of all she ordered one of the men to go outside and bring in a hen from the yard, and she cut its throat so that the blood ran into the Trinity Bottle. Next she cut a lock of hair from the farmer and his wife and took clippings from their toe-nails; these she sprinkled with salt before putting them into the bottle along with the insides of the hen and three of her tail and wing feathers. After that she rubbed some of the gizzard fat on the wife's forehead and bandaged her eyes then, putting her hand up the chimney, brought down some soot which she sprinkled on both the farmer and his wife who were ordered to go outside and fill the bottle with their urine.

When the couple came back into the room the witch stopped up the bottle with a piece of wet clay and put it in the middle of the fire. The candle was blown out and everyone sat in the dark waiting for the spell to be broken. Suddenly, with a loud bang, the clay cork and most of what was inside the bottle went flying up the chimney and a horrible smell filled the room. The charm worked, though, for when the bandage was taken off the woman's eyes she was as right as rain.

The farmer kicked that old witch out of the house, though, and picking the bottle out of the fire with the tongs hurled it after her. His wife had one child—a girl—and there was nothing wrong with her, but do you know that when *her* first baby was born, twenty-five years later, it had deformed hands, just like paws.

Witches could, on occasions, upset a day's work. Once, early in this century, W. H. Barrett was watching Ratty Porter, the Brandon Creek vermin-killer, as he was putting down ferrets along the bank by the main road to Littleport. Presently an old tramp woman came along and as she passed by she spat on the ferret box. Ratty pulled out the ferret from the rabbit burrow, took off its collar, placed the little animal in its box and then, slinging the box over his shoulder, picked up his spade and started off towards home. W. H. Barrett asked if he had finished for the day. 'I've got to leave off, if I'm finished or not,' said Ratty, 'because a ferret won't work and a rabbit won't bolt after they've been tudded¹ by that old witch who's just gone by.'

Little Shelford

In the MS. account of Great and Little Shelford compiled by Miss F. L. Wale in the first two decades of this century she recorded:

In one of the cottages (in The Terrace) lived for a short time a man named Rider, bootmaker. . . . He bewitched the bees of Mrs Prior. She tried to hive them eleven times and only succeeded when she threatened to burn them.

Longstanton

In 1657 Margaret Pryor of Longstanton began to spread abroad the story of how some Quakers had turned her into a mare and ridden her to a banquet four miles away. Opponents of Quakerism encouraged her to bring an accusation of witchcraft against the persons concerned and so, at the Assizes held in Cambridge on 28th July 1659 Margaret and two of the people whom she accused appeared before Judge Wyndham.

In court Margaret said that Widow Morlin had taken her out of bed one night, put a bridle into her mouth, changed her into a bay mare and ridden her to Maddenly House,² where the Quakers had hung her on the latch of the door and then gone in to feast on mutton, rabbits and lamb.

The Judge pressed her for particulars about her ride, asking her if she had not become dirty through being ridden upon, or if her hands and feet had not become sore. Margaret replied that her feet had been a little sore, but not her hands; neither had she been dirty.

¹ *Tudded*: bewitched. This word, formerly in use in the Cambs. Fens, is probably a corruption of *toaded*. Toads were often thought to serve as the imps or familiars of witches and were also used in casting spells.

² Madingley Hall.

Asked why she had not been ridden more than on this one occasion, she said that she had burned some elder bark and some of her own hair and so had prevented Widow Morlin from having any more power over her. This, said the Judge, proved that Margaret herself was a sorcerer, by her own confession; he considered Margaret Pryor to be 'a whimsical woman' and the whole affair 'a mere dream and a fantasy'. The jury found the accused Quakers not guilty and they were acquitted.

The Longstanton case is interesting in that it provoked the writing of no fewer than three pamphlets. John Bunyan, having, it seems, either been at the trial in person or received accounts of it, wrote a paper¹ in which he showed clearly that he believed Margaret's story, and by so doing slandered the Quakers. It may be that he actually interviewed her—at any rate, he added a few embroideries to her narrative, quoting her as saying she had been turned into a horse, whereas she had told the Judge that she had been transformed into a mare. He also wrote that she had been able to see the Quakers as they feasted and that, as they sat at table, they had shone as if they had been angels; moreover, she had been able to hear them discussing doctrine.

The second pamphlet, by anonymous authors who were probably members of the University, was published under the title of *Strange & Terrible Newes from Cambridge, being A true Relation of the Quakers bewitching of Mary Philips² out of the Bed from her Husband in the Night, and transformed her into the Shape of a Bay Mare, riding her from Dinton,² towards the University . . . Likewise, her Speech to the Scholars and Countrey-men, upon this great and wonderful Change . . .*³

This, too, gave credence to Margaret's story and reported her as showing to the jury her bruised hands and feet, which were 'as black as Coal', her side 'rent and torn . . . and her smock all bloody'. It described her as having forsaken membership of the Church of England in order to join the Quakers, but as later 'utterly denouncing them and detesting their actions'. This had led them to practise their witchcraft on her.

¹ The title of this is not known, nor is any copy known to have survived. The contents of Bunyan's pamphlet, however, can be ascertained from two other pamphlets referred to in the text.

² See text for this mistake in the name.

³ There is a copy of this pamphlet in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Ref. No. S 5827 D; 15117. A Xerox copy of this has been used for reference here. A second copy of the pamphlet, listed in Wing's *Short Title Catalogue* as being in the British Museum Library, cannot now be traced in that library.

The writers of the pamphlet launched further into a general condemnation of magicians, wizards and sorcerers, giving examples of their evil deeds in Rome, Maçon and Norwich. It concluded by an attack on the Quakers, accusing them of 'tampering about Futurities' and instanced the case of some London members of the sect who claimed to have seen a vision in which the City and Southwark were divided and extinguished in smoke.

The third pamphlet, published, as were the other two, in 1659, was written by a group of Cambridge Quakers, under Alderman James Blackley, and entitled *A Lying Wonder Discovered and The Strange and Terrible Newes from Cambridge proved false . . . Also This contains an answer to John Bunions Paper touching the said imagined witchcraft, which he hath given forth to your wonderment (as he saith) but it is also proved a Lye and a slander . . .*¹

In it the authors vehemently defended the Quakers and attacked the writers of the other two pamphlets. Margaret Pryor, they said, was 'an impudent Liar'. Had she not said that the people whom she accused had been seen by her feasting on mutton, rabbits and lamb? It was clearly untrue to say 'that they had Lamb at that time of the year, in November, or that she being a Mare (as she said) could distinguish of these meats'. Moreover, although she had been to a few Quaker meetings she had never been owned as being of the faith.

John Bunyan should be ashamed of believing that Margaret had seen the feasting Quakers shining like Angels and that she had heard them discussing religion; if she had really been turned into a horse, as he declared she was, then how could she have known what angels were like or understood doctrine?

What, thou a preacher to people and so given over to believe lyes, and false dreams . . . and thus thou has slandered the Quakers from the report of a wicked lewd woman . . . and hast thou not been an encourager of her in this horrible wickednesse in giving full credit to her, and getting her Lyes to publish?

As to the author of the other libel—to which he was too ashamed to sign his name—he, wrote the Quakers, was not even accurate in his report, for he gave Margaret's name as Mary Phillips and said she was ridden from Dinton 'and there is no such town in Cambridge-shire'. Everything in the libel was 'stuffed with lyes and confusion'. Its author had reported Margaret as saying that her hands and feet were bruised and that her smock was blood-stained, but she had, in

¹ Copy in British Museum Library. PSA/0443, C111, C.9. A Xerox copy of this has been used for reference here.

fact, never said this in court and, in any case, 'Can a horse be ridden in a woman's smock?'

Oh! grosse delusion and folly that ever Cambridge should be so dishonoured as to have such news as these proceeding from any of the learned in it. Oh! what a sad thing it is, that those who should be teachers are being given up to such strong delusions as to believe such lies, but where the well head is corrupt and dirty, it cannot send forth pure water.

The following story about Bet Cross, the village witch of the late nineteenth century, was told¹ shortly after the First World War by a Longstanton woman who, as a young girl, used to run errands for Bet.

They do say as 'ow she was a witch, but I never saw nothing. She used to come out and say to the carters, 'It's no use you beatin' them 'orses, because they *can't* go on till I lets 'em.' And the carters they'd go right round the other way rather than pass 'er cottage. Then there was that business about young —. He was walking down the lane by the church one Sunday afternoon, and there he saw Bet Cross ridin' on a hardle.² I don't rightly know which way up the hardle was, but there she was, and young — he said to her: 'Ah, Bet Cross. I see ye. I'll tell on ye. Yer a-riding on a hardle.' And Bet Cross she give 'im a queer look and she says: 'Young man', she says, 'you can tell on it when you think on it.' And the funny thing was that it went right out of 'is 'ead, and 'e never did tell on it till 'e 'eard the bell goin' out for 'er death, and that wasn't for years. And when he 'eard the bell 'e said: 'Why, if that isn't for old Bet Cross that I met ridin' on a hardle. Funny thing, I never thought to tell on it till now.'

The story apparently gave rise to a proverb in Longstanton: 'You can tell on it when you think on it, and you know when that'll be.'

Sawston

Among the papers of the Hudleston family of Sawston Hall is a letter,³ dated 7th October 1804, written by Jane Hudleston to her brother, Major Richard Hudleston, who was then stationed in the Chelsea Barracks. It describes a curious incident which took place in the house of the Sawston tanner, Thomas Adams, and his wife Susannah.

¹ To Mr Martin Hooton of Cambridge. He cannot now recall the name of the young man concerned.

² *i.e.* *Hurdle*: a portable rectangular frame, orig. having horizontal bars interwoven or wattled with withes of hazel, willow, etc. . . . but now often an open frame, like a field gate; used chiefly to form temporary fences, sheep-pens, etc. *O.E.D.*

³ Quoted here by kind permission of Mr F. Eyre Hudleston of Sawston Hall.

My dear Richard

. . . I am going to tell you an odd history of Mr Adams the Tanner's house being bewitched, that I think it necessary to beg you not to imagine that I have lost my senses and am become quite foolish; but really the occurrence is so singular that the most incredulous after due examination won't allow it to be the best executed trick that ever was, nor could give a better reason for supposing it to be one than that it cannot be anything else.

M^{rs} Adams since last Sunday has had her gown torn everyday in a manner she could not account for, but on Thursday early in the day, she was obliged to change it; in a short time the one she put on was as much torn as that she had taken off. So it continued till she had put on five. She then went to M^{rs} Murphil's house. No one was there but Mrs M. and Sally Cooper.¹ She told her misfortune and shewed her gown which was quite whole when she sat down, upon rising to their astonishment it was slit in several directions. She put on six gowns on Thursday and they were all rent.

Since then almost everyone that has been in the house have had their cloaths torn, men and women, old Adams' coats, etc. As to a niece that lives with her and her maid servant, their cloaths have been shivered to rags, and what is extraordinary, James Cooper and Mrs Jones saw a piece drop off and not a person near or touching it.

I have made a visit and escaped, but it is impossible to describe how much some of the cloaths are torn, quite strong cotton gowns, so that no beggar would accept them. Ned² and Mrs Portchalar (?) have just been there and escaped, also Mrs Adams has put on a new gown this morning and it continues whole. It cannot be done by any liquid drops for the cloaths are evidently rent, tho' no one hears them rend. The poor maid servant's eyes were quite swelled from crying when I saw her two gowns, and it is quite impossible for her ever to wear them again.

Half Cambridge will be over today to see the house and cloaths. Two gentlemen who came from there yesterday had their coats slit. A young woman who went to the house with Mrs Jones and Joseph Cooper kept her gown close under her arms the whole time. Mrs J. sitting next her and Joseph opposite her both declare no person was near her, nor could possibly have touched her. When she got up she said, 'Well, I am sure I have escaped' and opened the part of her gown that had been under her arms the whole time, when to her astonishment she found it rent in four places. The poor woman was so frightened she ran out of the house and was very near fainting.

You will be tired of rending and tearing but I thought such an event in our own country village too important not to relate somewhat at length, especially as I understand it is likely to be inserted in the London papers. . . .

¹ The 13-year-old daughter of James Cooper of Sawston and sister of Joseph, both mentioned in the letter.

² Jane Hudleston's brother, Edward.

These events were reported in the *Cambridge Chronicle* of October 11th, 1804. The incidents were briefly described very much as in Jane Hudleston's letter, but with the additional information that Mrs Adams's 15-year-old niece 'had only the body part of her gown remaining, the skirts having dropped off as she moved about'.

The newspaper account concluded:

Such were the reports on Saturday when the torn garments were brought to Cambridge and exhibited to the public. On Sunday many persons from Cambridge, as well as from the neighbouring villages, visited the house and returned without injury to their cloaths, and we have not heard of any operation of this invisible agent since last Saturday. Our readers will form their own opinion of the above transactions, which certainly did not proceed from any supernatural agency.

Had the 15-year-old niece, one wonders, any hand in the affair?

In Sawston churchyard is the 100-year-old gravestone of one Sarah Fitch with its now almost-illegible epitaph:

All you have seen amiss in me
Take care to shun and look at home
Enough there is to be done

These lines suggest to Mr T. F. Teversham, the Sawston historian, that Sarah may have been accused during her life of witchcraft.

Sutton

When John Bonham, a hedger, of Sutton was accused¹ of witchcraft in 1647 he said that the Devil had appeared before him one day in the form of a mole and had demanded his soul. On being refused this the mole had then begged for two drops of Bonham's blood in return for which he would be entirely at his service. Bonham let the mole suck blood from his finger and then, having given the animal his own name of John, sent it forthwith to kill some horses. Later he dispatched the mole to bewitch some cattle belonging to the local baker and, because the beasts had broken down some of his new hedges, some bullocks belonging to the Sutton thatcher.

Trumpington

S. P. Widnall wrote in 1889² of a reputed Trumpington witch:

In my young days there lived in one of the pair of old thatched cottages a little way back from the road, halfway from near the village school-

¹ Ely Diocesan Records (Gaol Delivery Rolls, E.5) (Camb. Univ. Lib.).

² *Trumpington 50 Years Ago*, printed on the author's private press in Grantchester.

house and the main road, a Fortune Teller, reputed to be a witch, commonly known as 'Mother Sivill'. I believe she was a bad old woman and had to pay periodical compulsory visits to the magistrates and to be punished for her ill-doings. I heard of her sleeping rough in the church porch and also under the trees in the open air. I believe she once stood in the pillory at Cambridge.

Whittlesford

On 28th April 1878 Susan Cooper of Whittlesford died. Mr J. Maynard, who was born in the village in the year of her death, can recall hearing in his youth many tales of Susan's witchcraft, but the one he now remembers best was the one told him on many occasions by an old bricklayer of Whittlesford.

My mother and Susan Cooper each bought a pig out of the same litter. Susan came in to see my mother's pig after a time and said it was doing much better than hers. But my mother felt quite sure Susan had witched it so she had it killed the next day as she knew it wouldn't do no more good. She put it in the pot but it wouldn't take the salt and was no good.

Large crowds turned up in the churchyard at Susan's funeral, thinking they were going to see some strange things happen. Mr Maynard spoke in 1966 to a man in the village who remembered hearing from his father that all the schoolchildren rushed to trample the ground over Susan Cooper's grave, immediately the burial service was over, 'so that the imps couldn't get out'.

Willingham

Miss Disbury of Willingham, who was still alive in c. 1900, was a witch with power over animals. A story¹ was told by one of the villagers of how he and his mate were driving some cows past her house when the animals stopped and refused to move.

An' we knew they wouldn't 'cos that old woman had bewitched them, so we knew we had to draw her blood. So I goes up to her house, knocks on the door and says: 'Can you let me have a match, Miss Disbury?' Well, when she goes inside the house to fetch it I gets out my shut-knife, opens it and when she comes back and hands me the match I give her a slash across the wrist then I runs like hell. But those cows moved all right after that.'

Jabez Few of Willingham, who died in the late 1920s, kept some white rats which the villagers called his imps; he used to play all kinds of practical jokes with them. Once he took them into the Brewers' Arms and the people in the bar declared they could hear them

¹ Recorded, 1966, from Mr F. Jeeps of Willingham.

running up and down the stairs, but when the door at the foot of the staircase was opened no sign of the imps could be seen.

Some villagers still remember what happened when one of the rats was shut up in a woman's bedroom.

One day Jabez put one of his imps in Connie Todd's bedroom and it couldn't get out, so someone said to old man Dudley—it was his house that Connie lodged in—'You must get a big tom-cat and he'll get it out.' So Dudley shut a big ginger tom in the room. Presently there was a terrific noise of fighting and when the door was opened there was fur all over the floor and the cat was flying up and down the curtains. But that imp was still somewhere about and it just couldn't be got rid of.

Then somebody else told Old Dudley he'd have to get a stone jar, put some clippings from a horse's hoof in it and the legs off a toad, then put the bottle on the fire, and if it didn't break then the spell would. So Dudley got the jar all ready and was just going to put it on the fire when someone called at the house so he had to put off trying to break the spell. He told his visitor what he was going to do and called Jabez every name under the sun for getting that imp into the house. 'I'll shoot him one day' he declared.

Jabez must have heard what he said, for about twenty minutes later he came up to the house, gave a loud whistle and the imp came out as meek as anything.

Jabez's house has stood empty since his death—people have said they wouldn't live in it if they were paid a thousand pounds. When the old man died his nephew could only get rid of the imps by standing in running water with them, whereupon they scuttled off and disappeared.

Wisbech

In the last century an old woman named Mrs Reeve, of Lake's End near Wisbech, was credited with witchcraft powers. The following account was recorded¹ in 1936 from a man whom she bewitched in 1878 so that he became covered with lice:

Old Mrs Reeve's darter had done wrong and I spoke the truth about her so the old gal said she'd do I don't know what to me and my mate. One night I came home all lousy, but I went to work next day. I was yardman at the time—it were 58 year ago, the year we got married. There were another young chap working with me and when he come up at dinner time I says to him, 'Don't you come near me, Twister, 'cos I'm lousy.' And I say to him 'If I don't get rid of these lice before I git hoom I'll shake hell over that old gal.'

Well, when Twister got home this old gal Reeve was at his mother's house, and he say to his mother, 'Mother, Bob Crawford's lousy'. When

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

he told this to his mother he told her just what I'd said at dinner time, so that old Mrs Reeve she heard it, and when she went home she were took bad and by the time *I* got home my head were as clean as it is now.

Rioting often occurred in the Fens in the early stages of the drainage works undertaken in the seventeenth century by the Earl of Bedford and his fellow 'Adventurers' who risked their money in the scheme. Fenmen, angry at the prospect of losing the fishing and wildfowling on which they depended for their livelihood, broke down newly made banks and dams and even, on occasions, attacked the drainage men as they worked.

In 1637 a woman was committed to prison in Wisbech charged with the dual offence of inciting a group of Fenmen to mutiny and of being a witch. The latter accusation was borne out by the messengers who were sent by boat to apprehend her. As they approached her she hurled abuse at them and 'soon the waterman was struck with a lamentable crick in the back that he was constrained to get help'.¹

By the second half of the eighteenth century persons who caused bodily harm to suspected witches could themselves be liable to punishment. This is borne out by a case brought before the Cambridge Quarter Sessions in 1769, when William Adams of Grantchester and his wife were indicted for ill-treating Phoebe Haly of Caldecote, a supposed witch. The couple agreed to pay Phoebe five guineas in reparation, and then the Court fined Adams 13s. 4d. and dismissed him and his wife with a severe reprimand.²

Sometimes the help of a witch was sought in order to discover the identity of a petty criminal. It was recorded in 1933³ that two very respectable women lived, in the last century, in adjoining houses in Swaffham Bulbeck. One of these women was left some money which she kept in the house. One day the money disappeared and the owner was almost sure that her neighbour had stolen it. To make certain she consulted a local wise woman-cum-witch, who ordered that a pail of water was to be placed in a certain position. A number of people who might, conceivably, have been guilty of the theft then had to pass in front of the witch and after they had done so she taxed one of them with the crime. This person was later brought before the magistrates, convicted and sent to prison for four months.

When the witch was asked how she had been able to discover the guilty person she replied that when the accused persons had passed

¹ F. J. Gardiner: *History of Wisbech and Neighbourhood*, 1898.

² *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1769.

³ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

in front of her the image of the guilty one had been reflected in the pail of water.

Breaking a Spell

The spells of Cambridgeshire witches were generally thought to be rendered harmless if a bottle containing hair and nail clippings and urine were burned secretly in the fire at midnight. Often the ritual caused suffering to the witch or brought her round to the door. In the latter case it was usually the custom to refuse to speak to her, as this made her powerless to leave and forced her to spend several hours in the open. Once a word was said to her she was free to go.

In 1936 the following method of breaking a spell was recorded¹ from the man who, as related above, had been bewitched by old Mrs Reeve of Lake's End near Wisbech.

Take a stone bottle, make water in it, fill it with your own toe nails and finger nails, iron nails or anything that belongs to you. Hang the bottle over the fire and keep stirring it. You mustn't speak or make a noise. The old witch'll come to your door and make a lot of noise and beg you to open the door and let her in. If you don't take no notice but keep quiet the old witch'll burst, but if you speak to her she'll be free.

The same man was told, in his youth, by an Upwell farmer, how a woman in the village who had been bewitched with lice succeeded in getting rid of the vermin.

She put one of those bottles over the fire and the old witch come and begged to be let in, and she kept on asking and asking. At last the woman's husband, who was upstairs in bed, shouted down to her 'Let the old devil go.' That broke the spell. Next morning they see the yard was full of water where that old witch had been walking up and down.

Drawing a witch's blood by cutting or pricking her was an effective way of breaking a spell and of making her powerless to do any future harm. W. H. Barrett was told in his youth of how a farmer's wife, near Littleport, was busy hanging up holly one Christmas Eve when an old woman, whom the neighbourhood was sure was a witch, came to the house begging for food. The woman forced her way into the kitchen and sat down in a chair on which the farmer's wife had hastily put down a sprig of holly on the arrival of her unwelcome visitor. The old witch leapt up as if she had been shot and hastily departed, clutching her buttocks. The farmer, told of the incident on his return home from work, remarked that if there was no knife handy then a sprig of holly was as good a way of drawing a witch's blood as any he knew.

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

A Great Eversden farmer said in 1966 that he heard, some years ago, that a Toft woman, anxious to break a spell, was told to pull some straw from her thatched roof, put it in a bottle and burn it in the fire, without speaking, until it burst. When she did this the witch came almost immediately to the house, begging those inside to speak to her; until they did so she would not go away.

Several Cambridgeshire people have said that the lice with which so many witches in the county seem to have infested their victims could be got rid of by sticking pins into a piece of flannel which had been worn next the sufferer's skin and then burning it at midnight.

Miss Parsons of Horseheath recorded¹ in 1915 the procedure followed by one of the villagers to rid some ducks of vermin.

Mrs H., formerly of Horseath, tells how her mother had a beautiful brood of young ducks, and when only a fortnight old, they were bewitched and covered with vermin. These young ducks just turned on their backs, kicked up their little feet, and were dying fast. Fearing she might lose the whole brood, the good woman sent to the shop for an ounce of new pins, and stuck them into one of the dead ducks. Then she made up a good fire, and at twelve o'clock at night, without telling anyone what she was going to do, she put the duck well into the middle of the fire, and before the duck had been burning ten minutes her fears were affirmed. The witch came screaming to the door, making the most agonising noise, for the pain caused by the pins in the burning duck had entered the witch, and we are told the rest of the ducks in the morning were found to be cured of their pest.

In 1950 a Soham woman related an instance of the bottle ritual which she witnessed as a child in *c.* 1900. In this case the ceremony was performed not to break a spell but to cast one. Her mother had recently been widowed and was very annoyed because her late husband's brother had acquired some property and money which she thought should rightly have been hers. She was advised by a gipsy woman, who came one day to the house selling pegs and to whom she related her grievance, to fill a bottle with her own urine and some nail parings and snippets of hair. These last were to be obtained, if possible, from her brother-in-law or, failing this, her own would do as well. She was then to seal the bottle and place it at midnight in the centre of a hot fire, directing her thoughts towards her brother-in-law as she did so and wishing him ill luck. If the bottle burst within two minutes she would know her spell had been successful.

The woman did as she was told and even made the children sit up with her and 'think bad things' about their uncle until the bottle burst. A few days later the man against whom the spell was directed

¹ *Camb. Antiq. Soc. Proceedings*, vol. XX, 1915.

fell from a ladder and broke his leg which, being badly set, failed to mend properly, so that he always walked with a limp.

Safeguards against Witchcraft

Many Cambridgeshire houses and cottages built in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been found, on demolition or restoration in this century, to contain in their walls small glass phials or bottles. Many of these phials probably originally held salt and because salt is a well-tried antidote to evil the bottles, full or empty, would be considered an effective safeguard.¹ It may be that when they were originally placed in the walls some bottles contained nails or pins, great faith being placed in the iron of which these objects were made. Many Cambridgeshire people remember hearing from their grandmothers that if a witch called at a house a pair of scissors, a knife or a key placed under the chair in which she sat would render her powerless. Old horseshoes are, of course, seen hanging on house and stable doors throughout the country, many of them originally placed there as protective devices many years ago.

A few witch bottles have been found filled with multi-coloured silk threads. One such, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, was discovered near a window in a Linton cottage, hanging on a beam which, in Victorian days, had been boarded over. The purpose of the threads may have been to dazzle the witch and so avert her evil eye in much the same way as the later so-called 'witch balls'² were said to do.

Not only houses were protected by witch bottles. One now in the Cambridge Folk Museum was discovered in the tower of Swaffham Bulbeck Church.

Occasionally the discovery is made in old Cambridgeshire houses of a layer of animal bones in a chimney breast. These were undoubtedly placed there by the builders as a protection for the occupants and represent a survival of the human sacrifice once made on the site of a new building to appease the earth spirits whose ground was being disturbed. A few years ago a number of horse bones were found between two courses of brick during restoration of a

¹ Plate 29.

² Balls of coloured glass—usually blue, red or green—averaging 6–8 in. in circumference, with metal discs at the top with attached metal ring for hanging. One example in the Cambridge Folk Museum, from a house in Gamlingay, has the date 1792 embossed on the metal top. These balls were originally *watch balls* because they were closely observed, as they hung in the window, by their owners. If the bright surface remained undimmed, all was well; if it became clouded or tarnished, then sickness, death or some other disaster was thus foretold.

sixteenth-century cottage in Histon. The largest of these, a leg bone, is preserved in the Cambridge Folk Museum together with a dog's leg bone found, during restoration of a seventeenth-century room in Magdalene College, carefully inserted in the bricks of the chimney breast.

In 1959, when the stables behind the Folk Museum, formerly the sixteenth-century White Horse Inn, were being demolished, the leg bone of a horse was found in a cavity beneath the foundations. This, too, has been preserved.¹

W. H. Barrett recalls that his uncle, a builder, secured the contract in 1897 for erecting a Primitive Methodist Chapel at Black Horse Drove.² One day he sent his nephew, then aged 6, with his elder brother to the knacker's yard to buy a horse's head. When the two boys returned with it they watched the workmen dig the trench for the foundations and then saw their uncle carefully mark the centre of the site by driving into the ground a wooden stake. The men gathered round while the uncle uncorked a bottle of beer, then the horse's head was placed in the bottom of the trench, the first glass of liquor poured from the bottle was thrown on to it and, when the rest of the beer had been drunk, the men shovelled bricks and mortar on top of the head. It was explained to W. H. Barrett that this was an old heathen custom to drive evil and witchcraft away.

Many builders in the Littleport Fens until *c.* 1910, he recalls, regularly fetched blood from the butchers and used this to mix the mortar to be used on the brickwork of chimneys and hearths. Some of them did this with the, by then, vague idea of bringing good luck to the future occupants of the house, but several, including his uncle, were of the definite opinion that the blood would be a safeguard against witchcraft. Salt-glazed bricks were often used, with the same purpose in mind, for building chimneys.

Other protective devices which have been found in Cambridge-shire houses, built into walls or hearths, include baby's shoes—one³ was discovered in the seventeenth-century Three Tuns Inn on the Cambridge Market Hill when it was pulled down in 1960—a wooden doll (at Comberton) and a patten³ (at Caldecote). Alteration to an old hearth in a Histon cottage in 1956 revealed the presence, behind the fire-back, of a seventeenth-century salt-glazed pot.

Holed stones⁴ have been found in many stables, farmhouses, cow-sheds and outbuildings in many parts of the county. W. H. Barrett's grandmother always had such a stone hanging above her bed to protect her from witchcraft.

¹ Plate 29.

² A district of Littleport.

³ Plate 29.

⁴ Plate 8.

A Thorney man said in 1957 that his great-aunt, of that village, who died in 1956 at the age of 81, once told him that when she was a child her mother had always made her wear a knot of scarlet ribbon pinned to her underwear. This was to protect her against witchcraft. She had, however, ceased to wear the ribbon from the time of her marriage because her husband had laughed at her for being so superstitious.

The faith placed in horseshoes as safeguards against witchcraft is illustrated by the following anecdote which Sir Henry Ellis quoted from the *Cambridge Advertiser* and added to his 1855 edition of Brand's *Popular Antiquities*.

A carpenter residing at Ely, named Bartingale, being lately taken ill, imagined that a woman named Gotobed, whom he had ejected from one of his houses, had bewitched him. Some matrons assembled in the sick man's chamber agreed that the only way to protect him from the sorceries of the witch was to send for the blacksmith, and have three horseshoes nailed to the door. An operation to this effect was performed, much to the anger of the supposed witch, who at first complained to the Dean [of Ely Cathedral], but was laughed at by his reverence. She then rushed in wrath to the sick man's room and, miraculous to tell, passed the Rubicon despite the horseshoes. But this wonder ceased when it was discovered that, in order to make the most of the job, Vulcan had substituted donkey's shoes . . .

A Bottisham carter, early in the present century, had an unhappy experience with horseshoes. The *St James's Gazette* of 13 July 1903 reported that the man, thinking that his horses had been bewitched, was advised to give them a broth containing 'horseshoes, nails and iron filings', with the result that one of the animals died.

An Orwell resident recalled in 1962 that when she was a child in c. 1910 her grandfather told her that in about the year 1880 some cattle in the village had suffered from some complaint caused, it was thought, through witchcraft. The owner of the beasts had, to break the spell, killed some shrews¹ and placed them in a hollow willow tree by the river near Malton. As the shrews decayed so the cattle had recovered.

¹ *Shrew*: any of the small insectivorous mammals belonging to the genus *Sorex* or the family *Soricidae*, much resembling mice but having a long, sharp snout. *O.E.D.*

6

Narratives and Traditions

Local Legends

The Lost Fiddler of Grantchester

Under the old Manor House of Grantchester are vast stone-walled cellars from which lead two passages or tunnels. One of these extends a very long way, the ceiling getting lower and lower as it does so, probably because of the accumulation on the floor of centuries of rubble. Tradition has it that the passage, the end of which has never been discovered, reaches as far as King's College Chapel.

A musician once announced his intention of exploring the tunnel to see how far it did indeed go. Bravely playing on his fiddle he set off, his music sounding loud and clear. Then it began to grow faint, then fainter still until at last it could be heard no longer. The fool-hardy fiddler was never seen again.¹

The Devil in March

Many years ago the people of March wanted to build a church² near the Market Place. The Devil, however, thought that the Fens belonged to him and he hated to see any house of God being built on

¹ On a seventeenth-century map of Grantchester, now in King's College, Cambridge, an eighteenth-century bursar entered local field names, one of which is *Fiddler's Close*. Information from Mr John Saltmarsh, M.A., Fellow of King's College.

² With the building of the railway in 1846-8 the town of March developed north of the Old Nene river. The older part of the town lies south of the bridge on the road leading to the church of St Wendreda, which, until 1855, was in Doddington. A modern church stands in the new town. The legend of the Devil in March was still known to elderly March residents of this century.

his property. So as soon as the work on the church began the Devil came and pulled everything down so that each dawn saw the labours of the day before completely wasted.

This state of affairs went on for some time until at last the people of March thought of the idea of setting up a cross in the hopes that this might drive the Devil away. The sight of the holy sign had the desired effect; the Devil left March, but, though the cross stayed where it had been placed, the church was, in fact, never built.¹

The removal of stones intended for the building of churches figures in other Cambridgeshire legends. At *Thriplow*, for example, it is said that the villagers planned to build the church down in the hollow where the village lies. After work had commenced, however, it was found that the stones had mysteriously moved themselves to the top of the hill. Unwilling to face the task of bringing them all down again, only perhaps to find them once more removed, the Thriplow people decided to build the church where it now stands, overlooking the village.

Cottenham church stands at one end of the long village. Tradition has it that the villagers once tried to move it nearer to the centre, but that the stones were, night after night, mysteriously brought back to the old site.

The Buried Church at Abington

On Abington Church Farm is a meadow known as Sunken Church Field. It is a local tradition that there was once a church or chapel there which at some time fell into disuse, so that in course of time the ruins became buried. At times, though, it was said the bells of the vanished church could be heard ringing underground and if anyone knelt with his ear pressed to the grass on a moonlit night he would hear the singing of a ghostly choir. Few villagers dared to go after dark into Sunken Church Field.

Caxton Gibbet

About two hundred and fifty years ago a man named Partridge was murdered in Monk Field in Bourn. The killer, however, managed to escape detection and escaped to America. Years later he returned to England and was bold enough to revisit the scene of his crime. One day, as he sat drinking in an inn at Caxton, he got into conversation

¹ The base of an old stone cross stands on the right of the road leading from the market-place towards St Wendreda's Church. A native of March who died in Cambridge in 1956, aged 80, gave it as his opinion in 1952 that the Devil legend arose, probably, to 'explain' the presence of the cross.

with some of the villagers who were in the taproom and they soon realised that he was no stranger to the place. Curious as to his identity, they began to ask him questions and the man, who had been drinking overfreely, began to talk too much. He boasted of how he had once robbed a nest of partridges and of how he had managed to evade the gamekeepers. The publican grew suspicious, remembering the Partridge murder, and sent for the constable. The man, identified by a birthmark, was arrested and eventually placed alive in an iron cage which was strung up on the gibbet which stood¹ on the bleak and windy cross-roads on the main road from Cambridge to St Neots. A passing baker, seeing the plight of the criminal, gave him a loaf of bread, for which kindly act he was himself later hanged from the same gibbet.²

The Skeleton which lost its Head

In about the year 1826 Ebenezer Hollick, the Squire of Whittlesford, levelled the Conical Hills and in so doing unearthed some Roman remains, including some human skeletons. The skull of one of these was taken by a labourer named Matthews, who, on returning home, placed it on his bedroom mantelshelf.

In the middle of the following night he was awakened by a loud pounding on his door and on putting his head out of the bedroom window he saw in the garden below a headless skeleton which, in a deep hoarse voice, demanded the return of its stolen head. In his fright, poor Matthews was only too glad to get rid of the skull, so taking it from the shelf he at once threw it down to its rightful owner.³

The Plague Pit of Chrishall

Broken pieces of tiles and bricks are still turned up from time to time in fields near Chrishall, reminders that the village once stood further uphill than it does now. Tradition states that five hundred years ago Old Chrishall was completely destroyed by fire which either came as a disastrous accident or was deliberately started in order to cleanse the village after an outbreak of plague. It is still said that the victims of the plague were buried together in one grave and that on no account must that part of the churchyard ever be opened. Some

¹ A modern replica of a gibbet now stands near the Caxton Gibbet Hotel at the cross-roads.

² Information supplied in 1948 by the late Miss C. Parsons of Horseheath, who learned the story from the late Dr W. Palmer of Linton.

³ Recorded in 1966 from Mr J. Maynard of Whittlesford, who said that the story is still known to old people in the village.

say that the plague pit is just inside the gate on the right of the path; others that it is near the Vicarage drive.¹

The Mysterious Bell of Guilden Morden

In the year 1845 twenty-three men, women and children emigrated from Guilden Morden to America, voyaging on the fateful *Cataraqui* which was wrecked on August 4. All on board were drowned. News of the disaster took long to reach the village, but there are still people who can recall hearing from their grandparents of the bell which mysteriously tolled all over Guilden Morden at what proved later to be the exact time of the shipwreck.²

The Wandlebury Legends

South-east of Cambridge rise the 240-foot-high Gog Magog Hills with the great Iron Age fort of Wandlebury on their summit. On the inner ring of the fort stood until recently the seventeenth-century mansion once the seat of Lord Godolphin and later of the Dukes of Leeds.³

On the slope of the hills was visible, certainly until early in the eighteenth century, the figure of a giant outlined in the turf; William Cole, the Cambridgeshire antiquarian, described in his MSS.⁴ how he used to see the figure when, as a child in c. 1724, he drove in from Balsham to Cambridge. All traces of the figure were, however, later lost, until in 1954 Mr T. C. Lethbridge attempted to recover them by means of excavation and of soundings taken with a steel bar on the southern slopes of the hills and subsequently plotted on paper. In this way he obtained a picture which he interpreted as that of Magog, the Earth Goddess, walking beside her chariot, followed by Gog or Helioth or Baal with, in front of them, the Spirit of Darkness poised for flight.⁵

Certain anatomical details of the goddess and of her horse which the plottings revealed have been interpreted by Mr Lethbridge as pointing to the group of hill figures as a place to be visited for the performance of ancient religious ceremonies. Games were certainly held in the past on the Gog Magog Hills, for, in 1574, it was decreed

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institute, 1954.

² Recalled by members of the Women's Institute, 1957.

³ The mansion has been pulled down, but the Cupola Stable Block remains. The Gog Magog Estate is now the property of the Camb. Preservation Soc. and is open to the public.

⁴ In the British Museum.

⁵ The discoveries made by Mr Lethbridge are described by him in an article in *Folk-lore*, Dec. 1956, and in his book *The Buried Gods: Gog and Magog*.

by the University 'that no scholar of what degree soever he be, shall resort or go to any play or game either kept at Gog-Magog Hills or elsewhere within five miles of Cambridge'.¹

The Wandlebury site had long figured in old tales and beliefs. One tradition held that Gog and Magog were buried in the hills, another that a horse was buried a short way to the west of Wandlebury. The fact that the famous stallion, the Godolphin Arabian, is buried in the Cupola Stable Block, where its grave, bearing the date 1753, may still be seen, may have been confused with earlier memories of the horse once visible in the group of hill figures. There was an old tradition, too, that a golden chariot was buried in a tumulus called Mutlow Hill.² Most of these beliefs persisted until the mid-nineteenth century, at which period a belt of beech trees was planted on the western slopes of the hills, so that the site was lost from view and the old stories came to be forgotten.

The oldest Wandlebury legend is that told by Gervase of Tilbury in his *Otia Imperialia* written about the year 1211:

In England, at the boundary of the diocese of Ely, there is a town named Cantabrica, in the neighbourhood of which there is a place called Wandlebiria, from the fact that the Wandali, when ravaging Britain and savagely murdering the Christians, placed their camp there. Now, where they pitched their tents on the hill-top, there is a level space surrounded with entrenchments and with a single entrance, like a gate. There is a very ancient tradition, attested by popular report, that if a warrior enters this level space at the dead of night, when the moon is shining, and cries 'Knight to knight, come forth', immediately he will be confronted by a warrior, armed for fight, who charging horse to horse, either dismounts his adversary or is dismounted. But I should state that the warrior must enter the enclosure alone, although his companions may look on from outside. As proof of the truth of this I quote a story told to me by the country people of the neighbourhood. There was in Great Britain, not many days ago, a knight redoubtable in arms and possessed of every noble quality, among the barons second in power to few, to none in worth. His name was Osbert, son of Hugh. One day he came as a guest to the town I have mentioned, and, it being winter time, after supper, as is the fashion with great folk, he was sitting in the evening by the fireside in the family of his wealthy host, and listening to tales of exploits of ancient days; and while he gave ear to them it chanced that one of the people of the country mentioned the wondrous legend aforesaid. The brave man resolved to make personal trial of the truth of what he was told. So he selected one of his noble squires, and, attended by him, went to the place. In complete armour he came to the appointed spot, mounted his steed, and, dis-

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 321.

² Excavations made there in the middle of the last century brought to light only funeral urns.

missing his attendant, entered the camp alone. He cried aloud to discover his opponent, and in response a knight, or what looked like a knight, came forth to meet him, similarly armed, as it seemed. Well, with shields advanced and levelled lances they charged, and each horseman sustained his opponent's shock. But Osbert parried the spear-thrust of his antagonist, and with a powerful blow struck him to the ground. He was on his feet again in an instant, and, seeing that Osbert was leading off his horse by the bridle, as the spoils of conquest, he poised his lance and, hurling it like a javelin, with a violent effort he pierced Osbert's thigh. Our knight however in the exultation of his victory either did not feel or did not regard the wound, and his adversary having disappeared, he came out of the camp victorious, and gave the horse which he had won to his squire. It was tall, active and beautiful to behold. He was met on his return by a number of the family, who marvelled at the tale, were delighted at the overthrow of the knight, and loudly applauded the bravery of the illustrious baron. When Osbert took off his arms and discarded his iron greaves he saw one of them filled with clotted blood. The family were amazed at the wound, but the knight scorned fear. The neighbours, aroused from slumber, came thronging together, and their growing marvel induced them to keep watch. As evidence of the victory the horse was kept, still tethered. It was displayed to public view with its fierce eyes, erect neck and black mane; its knightly saddle and all its trappings were likewise black. At cockcrow the horse, prancing, snorting and pawing the earth, suddenly burst the reins that held it and regained its native liberty. It fled, vanished, and none could trace it. And our noble knight had a perpetual reminder of the wound which he had sustained, in that each year, as the same night returned, the wound, though apparently cured and closed, opened again. So it came about that the famous warrior, some years later, went over sea and, after performing many deeds of valour against the heathen, by God's will ended his days.¹

Tom Hickathrift the Giant

Tom Hickathrift is the legendary giant of the Wisbech area of Cambridgeshire, although his traditions and legends extend over the county border into Norfolk. Many of the stories told about him and about his famous deeds must originally have been spread by oral transmission, but at the end of the eighteenth century he entered the realm of the chapbook and, in the nineteenth, of juvenile literature.²

Hickathrift's memory is preserved still in place-names and in various objects both in Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. At Emneth, near Wisbech, Hickathrift Farm and Hickathrift House still stand near Hickathrift's Corner. A near-by field, reputed to have been the

¹ Translation by Arthur Gray, *Camb. Antiq. Soc. Proceedings*, No. LVIII, 1911.

² A representative collection of such volumes is in the library of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum.

site of his castle, and the rough hollow once called Hickathrift's Washbasin, have now been built over, but his 'candlesticks', his grave and even his supposed statue are still to be seen in Norfolk. The 'candlesticks' are the uprights of old memorial crosses and bear signs of the armorial shields which must at some time have been wrenched from them. One of them, removed from the field near Hickathrift's Corner, now stands in the Vicarage garden at Terrington St John's; two are in the churchyard of Tilney All Saints. One of these last has on the top five indentations and a local inhabitant said in 1961 that he had always been told that these were the imprints of the giant's finger and thumb.¹

In the same churchyard, close to the south side of the church, is an oval stone, nearly 8 feet long, and still declared by many people to be the gravestone of the giant. A story still current in Tilney is that Tom Hickathrift stood one day on the bank of a now dried-up river three miles away and hurled a stone, declaring that where it fell there he wished to be buried. The stone bounced off the wall of the church and fell on the site of the gravestone. The 'tomb' now bears no marks upon it—the grass has been allowed to grow over much of it—but there is a tradition that once there could be seen on it a cross within a circle, said to be the emblems of the wheel and axle-tree² with which Tom once destroyed in combat another giant.

In a corner of the chancel wall of Walpole St Peter's Church in Norfolk is an ancient stone figure locally said to represent Hickathrift, who is supposed to have overcome the Devil in the churchyard. It was the giant's great strength and his ability to overcome his enemies which endeared him to the men of the Fens and of the Marshland round Wisbech, themselves always waging war against tyrannical landlords, drainage experts and the Church.

The best-known stories, still current, about Hickathrift are those which tell of how he carried two great loads of straw upon his back; of how he fought and killed another giant and of how he won a wager. It was the constant repetition of these tales which probably led to Hickathrift being credited with further deeds of strength and daring which eventually made their way into print.

Tom Hickathrift and the Loads of Straw

Tom Hickathrift was the son of a poor widow woman who lived many hundreds of years ago near Wisbech. He was a lazy lad, spend-

¹ Plate 30.

² *Axle-tree*: the fixed bar, etc., on the rounded ends of which the opposite wheels of a carriage revolve. *O.E.D.*

ing all his time in the chimney corner and eating as much as would have satisfied half a dozen grown men. He grew so big that when he was only 10 years old he stood 6 feet tall and his hands were as big as saddles of mutton.

A farmer in the neighbourhood, feeling sorry for the widow for having such a good-for-nothing son, said one day that she could have two bundles of straw from his yard for nothing, but she would have to get someone to collect it. One morning, therefore, Tom's mother asked her son to go over and fetch her gift. At first he refused, but at last, giving way to her pleadings and scoldings, he said he would go if she got him some rope so that he could more easily carry the straw. Off she went to a neighbour and soon came back with a stout length of cord.

'That's no good,' said Tom, 'I must have a cart rope.' So away she went again and this time returned with the cart rope. 'That's better,' said Tom as he took it from her and set off.

When he got to the farm the farmer told him to take as much straw as he could carry, so Tom laid the rope on the ground and began to pile the straw on it until he had as much as might have filled a wagon. Then he tied the bundle together, hoisted it on his back and went off home, carrying his load as easily as if it had been a sack of corn.

The farmer, meanwhile, much taken aback by the great amount of straw which Tom had taken, decided that he would not get so much in the second bundle, and so he hid two stones, each weighing a hundredweight apiece, in his straw stack.

When Tom came back to the farm he spread the rope out on the ground, put on it as much straw as he had before, not noticing the stones which he had gathered up with it, then tied the bundle and walked away as easily as he had done the first time. As he went along one of the stones dropped out with a clatter on the road.

'Dear me,' said Tom, 'how badly they have cleaned this straw; some of the corn is dropping out.'

A little further on the second stone fell on the road.

'There's some more corn dropping,' said Tom to himself. 'I really shall have to tell the farmer about it', and went on his way with his great load till he reached home, where his mother could hardly believe her good fortune in having so much straw.

How Tom Hickathrift fought and killed another Giant

Tom's mother boasted to all her friends and neighbours of how her son had carried such a heavy load on his shoulders, and so easily, too.

Soon the news of his deed spread abroad and from then on he could no longer idle his time away, for people came from far and near to employ a youth who had, it seemed, the strength to do the work of three or four men.

Among those who heard of him was a brewer of King's Lynn and he came and asked Tom to work for him, carrying beer from Lynn to Wisbech. Tom agreed to do so and the brewer showed him the road he must drive the dray along, warning him to keep to that way, otherwise he would pass over land where a giant ruled and who, it was said, killed anyone who dared to put a foot on to his property.

Tom began his work, but he soon found out that if he went along the road guarded by the giant it would shorten his journey by half. So one day, without saying anything to his master, he drove along the forbidden way. When he reached the gate at the end of the road the giant came roaring out to meet him and challenged him to a fight, threatening to dash his brains out with the great club he had in his cave.

'Go and fetch your club,' said Tom, 'and I'll fight you, for I have a weapon here that will surely kill you for all your club.'

Then, when the giant had gone off to fetch his club, Tom took the wheel and the axle-tree off the dray and, using the wheel as a shield, went forward to meet the giant, giving him a great crack with the axle-tree on the side of his head so that he almost fell.

'What?' said Tom, 'does my small beer make you stagger? Well, this should make you quite drunk', and with that he dealt him such a blow that the giant fell dead upon the ground. Then Tom went into the giant's cave and found it filled with gold and silver and jewels of every size and colour, and he became very rich.

How Tom Hickathrift won a Wager

Soon after Tom Hickathrift had started working for the brewer, and not long before he fought and killed the giant, he was driving one day to Wisbech with a load of beer when he came up with a stranger on the road—a huge man nearly as tall as himself. Tom pulled up, got down from his seat and turned to meet him. Getting into conversation, the two began to boast of what they could do—what heavy loads they could carry, what great meals they could eat, how far they could walk without tiring.

'I'll wager you a golden sovereign,' said the stranger, 'that I can drink more than you can at one draught.'

'Done,' said Tom, 'but first show me what you can do.'

So the stranger lifted up in one hand one of the barrels from the

dray, drew out the bung with his teeth and drank the contents without taking his lips away till the barrel was empty.

‘Now see if you can do better,’ he said.

Tom took all the barrels off the dray, turned the cart on its side and took off a wheel and an axle-tree. Then he laid the wheel flat on the ground, stuck the axle-tree upright in the middle and then balanced a hogshead of beer on the top. Lifting up all three on his clenched fist he drained the hogshead at a draught as easily as though he were drinking from a wineglass.

The stranger knew that he was outdone; so he threw a gold sovereign at Tom’s feet and strode off up the road.¹

Printed stories of Hickathrift include accounts of his conquest of ten thousand rebels who were causing disturbances in the Isle of Ely, of his courtship of a rich young widow in Cambridge, of his outwitting a rival suitor, of his marriage and subsequent knighthood and of his freeing the county of Kent from the ravages of a giant. But it is by the tales of his victory by means of the wheel and axle, of his wager and of his great physical strength that he is still best remembered. Until well within this century naughty children in the Wisbech area were subdued by the threat ‘Old Hickathrift’ll get you’, while the old rhyme was still well known up to forty or so years ago:

He ate a cow and a calf,
An ox and a half,
The church and the steeple,
And then all the people,
And still had not enough.

The three tales which follow are traditional Fenland stories heard by W. H. Barrett early in this century.² The first was related by Jack Butcher, a waterman, in most of the alehouses along the river between Cambridge and King’s Lynn. The second was told to W. H. Barrett in 1902 by Robert Newell, always known as ‘Shepherd’, who died at Littleport in *c.* 1906. The third is one of the stories told by the old Fenman, Chafer Legge.

The Knight and the Bees

A long time ago some knights came over to Ely to ask the Abbot to

¹ These narratives are based on those remembered as related to me in childhood in the early 1920s.

² Fenland tales heard by W. H. Barrett in his youth in the 1890s and early 1900s are to be found in his *Tales from the Fens* (1963) and *More Tales from the Fens* (1964), both published by Routledge & Kegan Paul.

give them his blessing and also some money to help them in the war they were going to fight against the heathen Turks. They were made a real fuss of and were given good food and plenty to drink, but they soon found out that staying at the Abbey was a bit on the dull side, there being no women about. So after a day or so, they began to look around for a little bit of pleasure before they set off on their long journey.

Now, at that time the Abbot had a shepherd who lived in a hut at Turbury, not far from Ely. This chap was rather a young one for such a job, but as the flocks wandered about a good deal in search of food it wouldn't have been easy for an older man to look after them because of all the running about that had to be done. Sometimes the shepherd had to be away for two or three days at a time, leaving his young wife all alone in the hut. She never felt lonely, though, for she had several hives of bees which gave honey to make the mead¹ which she sold to the monks.

One morning, when her husband was away at his work, she was down by the hives when she heard the sound of a horse cantering down the track leading to the hut and she saw it was being ridden by a knight in armour. When he was about twenty yards or so away, the man got off his horse, pulled down the bit of armour which covered his face, and went into the hut. From where she stood the young woman could just get a glimpse of him as he looked all about him and then spied a big jug of mead on the table. He helped himself to it, not setting it down till it was quite empty. Then he put on his helmet again and came outside, and though she tried to hide behind the hives it wasn't long before he spotted the shepherd's wife.

'Here, my pretty maid,' he said when he got up to her. 'Just you come along with me and show me where you keep your store of that drink I've just tasted, so I can quench my thirst before I take you back to Ely with me, because that's why I've ridden this way after those monks told me what a beauty you are.'

'Oh no, sir,' she said, 'you can't do that; I'm an honest married woman and my ring was blessed by the Abbot.'

'Don't let that ring bother you,' said the knight. 'I can give you a far better ring than that, so just you come along now.'

The young woman fell down on her knees in fright and called on all the saints in heaven to save her.

'It's no good you shouting out for help,' said the knight, 'there's no one here to hear you', but she knew different. She often used to

¹ *Mead*: an alcoholic liquor made by fermenting a mixture of honey and sugar; also called *metheglin*. *O.E.D.* See also Appendix III.

talk to her bees, you see, and they always seemed to understand what she said to them. So now, in a low voice, she told them a wicked man was trying to take her away and they must do something about it.

Well, do you know, when they heard all this those bees began to swarm all round her, and when the knight tried to grab hold of her they got a whiff of the mead he'd spilt down his chest when he was drinking, and they all set off towards him. Soon they were all fighting and pushing to find room on him; some of them found the eye slits in his face armour and in they went and settled round his mouth; others crawled through cracks and got in his ears and down the back of his neck.

Now everyone knows that nothing makes bees madder than the smell of fermented liquor, and it wasn't long before they were stinging that knight like mad until, driven crazy with the pain, he tore off to the near-by river, jumped in and was drowned.

How the Bishop got his Crook

Now, bor, you must remember that all my family were shepherds a long time before the monks came to Ely. Now, always just before a shepherd died he passed over his crook to his eldest son who was going to carry on with his father's job, so the same crook went on being used, year and year out for generations. Only once did one of my family come to lose his crook, and it happened this way.

He worked for the Abbot of Ely, who had a lot of sheep on his manors. Merchants used to come from a long way off to buy the wool and all the dealings went on at an inn called the Woolpack, which you can still see today. Only a few tups¹ and ewes could be fed in winter in those times, so every October a big market was held to sell off the sheep they couldn't feed in winter—that was the beginning of Ely Fair. Shepherds from all over the place brought their flocks to the sale, and when it was all over they used to have a big jollification to celebrate the easy time they'd have until lambing came along next spring. It was during one of these celebrations that my ancestor lost his crook.

Up at the Abbey a lot of feasting was going on, with saddle of mutton washed down with plenty of wine, because the Abbot always told his pals from a long way off to come to Ely at the time of the fair. Well, this time there was one visitor who was a bishop; he carried a long staff as a kind of walking-stick. Down at the fair, when he saw my ancestor carrying his crook, he stopped and asked him why his stick was bent over at one end.

¹ Rams.

‘It’s like this,’ said my ancestor. ‘I’m always getting sheep which break away from the rest of the flock and if they are tups they take a lot of catching, so I made this crook so I can catch them by hooking them round one of their hind legs or round the neck without having to do a lot of running about. This way I soon have them back in the fold, but you have to be careful with young ewes, as a lot of damage can be done if they’re rough handled.’

When the Bishop heard all this he said: ‘Hand that crook over; it’s just the tool I want to do my job properly, because I often find some of *my* flock have strayed and it’s a lot of trouble to get them back in the fold again.’

The price the Bishop offered was so good that my ancestor parted with the crook, so now you know how the first bishop came to carry a crook when he went out on Sundays. Now all bishops carry them, but none of them know half as much as us old shepherds about how to deal with a wandering old tup and how to teach him not to stray away from the fold.

Why Fen Skates are called Pattens

Why do we call skates pattens? Well, I’ll tell you. Now, this happened years and years ago when everybody in the Fens did just as they liked and those that lived outside daren’t come into the Fens because if they did they didn’t get out again.

In those days Fenmen used to get about in winter on the ice with bones tied on their feet—they’d gone about like this for hundreds of years. Then, over in Ely, men started to build a church and the Fenmen noticed that these chaps, when they sneaked into the Fens to catch ducks and geese for their dinners in winter, managed to get along the frozen rivers so fast that no one could catch them. They had something on their feet, you see, that was better than bits of bone. So the Fenmen decided that something must be done about it, especially after they heard that the building in Ely wasn’t getting on as fast as it should and that a lot more men had been taken on, which meant that more of them would be wanting ducks and geese to eat.

So the Fenmen hid themselves up in the reeds along the river one day, between Portly Hill and Ely, and it wasn’t long before they saw a gang of the building chaps coming along a narrow path on the ice between the reeds and rushes. The Fenmen let them go by and then they went and smashed up the ice for a couple of yards along the path, knowing full well that soon those bird-catchers would be back again hell for leather, with a crowd of Fenmen behind them.

Sure enough, back they soon came, travelling along like billy-o;

then they hit that patch of broken ice and a second after were standing up to their necks in mud and water. The Fenmen let them stay there till they were well soaked, then they yanked them out, nearly frozen to death, and pulled off what they were wearing on their feet.

All this time those Ely chaps were making a hell of a row, but whether they were swearing or praying the Fenmen couldn't tell, as they couldn't make head nor tail of their lingo. Anyway, after taking what they wanted they chased those chaps back to Ely to get on with their church building, and, believe it or not, the place where they caught them is still called Catchwaters, and if you want to get to it from Ely you have to go across Padnall Fen. Now, that Fen got its name because those poor devils had to pad barefoot to get home. I've told you this in case anyone ever asks you what those names mean.

Well, when the Fenmen got back to the huts where they lived they had a good look at what those Ely chaps had been wearing on their feet and they found they were wooden soles with long bits of iron fastened to them. They tried them on and after a bit of practice they found they were a lot faster on them than on the bones they'd been used to; the only thing was they didn't know what the things were called.

Then one day they came across one of the monks who'd been turned out of Ely after being blinded for having seen something he shouldn't have seen. So they took him home and looked after him. He was very weak and thin when they found him, but with good grub inside him he soon picked up and they let him do whatever he liked, because they knew he couldn't wander far away.

One morning they noticed he was whittling away at a piece of wood and soon he'd carved two pieces like the soles of wooden shoes, but they couldn't ask him what they were, because he couldn't understand them and they never knew what he meant when he was talking. Anyway, during the spring and summer he picked up the Fenman's talk, so he was able to tell them a bit about himself and how he'd come over from France and how, when he was a boy, he lived near some marshes which froze hard in winter, so everybody went about on the ice wearing patins. He showed them the two bits of wood he'd carved and said they were called patins in his country. So that's how the Fenmen got to know the name and why they've called their wood and iron skates patins ever since.

The influence of the undergraduates who, in the last century, used to go fishing and wildfowling in the Fens is evident in this last story with its false etymology of place-names. Students and Fenmen met in

village inns and on the river and the mingling of two cultures is reflected in several of the stories recalled by W. H. Barrett in *Tales from the Fens* and *More Tales from the Fens*.

A little story heard by a Cambridge man in 1910 from a man born in 1853 may also owe its origin to undergraduate humour. The tale was well known, earlier in this century, in the Barnwell district of Cambridge. It purports to explain the origin of the name of Stourbridge Common, which, until the middle of the last century, was more often spelt—as it was pronounced—*Stirbitch*.

How Stirbitch Common got its Name

One evening, many years ago, a tramp who had walked with his dog all the way from Newmarket came to the open fields on the edge of the little village of Barnwell. Footsore and exhausted, he threw himself down to rest under the shelter of a hedge and at once fell into a deep sleep which lasted three days and three nights. Waking up at the end of the third day the tramp sighed, yawned, stretched himself and yawned again and finally sat up. Then he saw that his dog was still lying curled up at his feet. Fearful lest the poor beast had died of hunger during his long sleep, the tramp hastily prodded the animal with his foot and called out, 'Stir, bitch.'

A hedger and ditcher, just finishing off his day's work near by, heard him and, coming over, said: 'We've never had a name round here for this bit of land, but now it will for evermore be known as Stirbitch Common.'

A Wager in Balsham

Just over a hundred years ago some Balsham men sat drinking one evening in the inn and talking of this and that. After a while the conversation turned to laying wagers on feats of daring.

'I'm ready to wager,' said one of the men, 'that none of you dare go down into the grave they're digging in the churchyard for old Sam's burial and bring back a skull, for you know the sexton's spade always turns up old bones when graves are opened.'

'I'll take you up on that,' replied another of the company. 'Tomorrow night, by which time the grave will be finished, I'll do it, and bring back a skull to prove it.'

One of those who heard this decided to put the man's courage to the test, and arriving first in the churchyard next evening hid himself behind a tombstone near the freshly opened grave. In a little while the other man arrived and the watcher, by the faint light of a half moon, saw him go down into the grave and begin his search. After

several minutes he saw that the man had come across a bone.

'Drop that, that's mine,' called the watcher in a deep voice. Undismayed, however, the searcher continued and soon came on another bone. Once again the watcher growled, 'That's mine.'

'Damn it,' came the reply from inside the grave, 'I know that's a lie, for you never had two skulls.'¹

Strange Characters and Curious Incidents

The narratives which follow are concerned mainly with Cambridgeshire people of the past two hundred years or so who, by virtue of their eccentric actions, unusual physique or of the strange incidents in which they were involved have become very much a part of local history. There comes a time, however, though the precise moment is difficult to determine, when many such people enter the realm of folklore. Elizabeth Woodcock of Impington, for example, whose unusual experience is told below, has already become almost a figure of legend. Many Cambridgeshire children of this century have been brought up on the story of her long imprisonment in the snow and have gained the impression that she was young and beautiful, the heroine of a kind of fairy tale. A visitor to the Folk Museum in 1964, seeing engravings of her and objects which had belonged to her, expressed surprise that she had indeed ever existed; to him she had always belonged to the world of fiction.

Jacob Butler, the eccentric occupant of Abbey House, who ordered his own coffin and kept it in his hall, is known to many from the etching² of him which makes no attempt to soften his harsh features. There are still people who connect him with the haunting of Abbey House which is discussed in the section *Ghosts*.

Stories of the Histon giant are still remembered and told in the village; it may well be that in future generations the tales will become embroidered as were those of Hickathrift, and so he, too, will become folklore. Jeremiah Lagden is already part of Cambridgeshire lore and of recent years the tale has been told that he has returned to Abington as a ghost.

Memory of the tragic fire at Burwell and of those who perished in it is kept alive by the presence in the churchyard of the 'Flaming Heart Gravestone' with its brief inscription. The longer tale of the events which led to the fire and of the man who confessed to being

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institute.

² Plate 31.

its cause is still told. Versions, however, have begun to vary and it would be interesting to hear what legend will be attached, a hundred years from now, to the gravestone should it still be preserved.

*The Strange Adventure of Elizabeth Woodcock.*¹

On February 2nd, 1799, Elizabeth Woodcock of Impington, the mother of several children, rode into Cambridge on horseback to do her usual weekly shopping, it being Saturday and Market Day. At about six o'clock in the evening, her purchases completed, she set off on her homeward journey, riding along Bridge Street, Magdalene Street and up the Castle Hill, where she stopped for a warming glass of gin at the Three Tuns Inn, for it was a cold and bleak evening. When she came outside again it was quite dark; snow had been falling at intervals throughout the day and now it was coming down more thickly and a bitter north-east wind was blowing. As Elizabeth rode on she was almost blinded by the swirling flakes and had to bend low in the saddle, so buffeted was she by the strong wind.

When she was almost half a mile from her home and on a bridle path which she had taken as being a shorter way, the light of a falling meteor shot across the sky, which so alarmed her horse, Tinker, that he reared, turned round and bolted towards a ditch which ran alongside the path. Elizabeth, forced to dismount, set off after him and managed to lead him a short way, but the frightened animal could not be controlled and, tearing himself from her grasp, galloped off into the darkness.

Elizabeth was too weary to go after him; she was weighed down by the weight of the basket of groceries on her arm and her clinging, snow-sodden garments; she had, moreover, drunk more during the day than that glass of gin at the Three Tuns. So, after struggling on for a few yards, losing one of her shoes as she did so, she at last sat down under the shelter of a hedge growing on the top of a high bank.

The falling snow drifted and piled up all around her as she sat, until at last she found herself, imprisoned and unable to move, in a kind of cave formed by the thick wall of snow in front of her and the bank with its overhanging hedge at her back. Here she stayed, hour after hour, day after day, night after night, hearing at intervals the bells of Chesterton Church, a mile or so away, and the voices of passers-by on the high road only a few yards from the bridle path where she sat.

After three or four days had passed she saw a faint gleam of light through the wall of snow in front of her and managed with great

¹ Plate 32.

difficulty to tie her red handkerchief to a twig which she pushed through the snow, hoping that it might attract attention.

Meanwhile, ever since Tinker had galloped riderless home, men from Impington and Histon had been out in search of the missing woman, scouring the snow-covered fields and shouting out at intervals, 'Elizabeth Woodcock, where are you? Elizabeth Woodcock, where are you?' But it was not until the Sunday, February 10th, that a young farmer, William Muncey, caught sight of the red handkerchief fluttering in the wind. Approaching the spot, he heard what sounded like a human voice, and peering through the wall of snow he saw what seemed to be a human figure. Thinking it might perhaps be the missing Elizabeth and uncertain what to do, he went across a field to where a shepherd was working and told him what he had found.

'If it is indeed Mrs Woodcock,' he said, 'it must be part of the dream I had last night, for I dreamed that I should find a hare today.'

The two men walked over to the pile of snow and the shepherd called out, 'Are you there, Elizabeth Woodcock?'

'Yes,' called back Elizabeth, 'I am here; and it is you, John Stittle, whose voice I hear. For pity's sake get me out of here.'

With great difficulty the men freed her from her prison and, news of her discovery having been sent to her husband, he and friendly neighbours came with a chaise into which she was gently lifted and driven home.

She lived until the July, in great suffering from the frostbite which caused her toes and fingers to turn gangrenous and finally drop off. Hundreds of people came from the county and beyond to see the woman who had miraculously survived her long imprisonment in the snow.

Impington parish register contains her burial notice:

On the eleventh Day of July 1799 died Elizabeth Woodcock wife of Daniel Woodcock, aged 43 years of a lingering Disease in consequence of a confinement under the snow of nearly eight days and nights, that is to say from Saturday the second till Sunday ye tenth day of February 1799.

Below, in another hand, is written:

She was in a state of intoxication when she was lost. N.B. her death was accelerated (to say the least) by spirituous liquors afterwards taken—procured by the donations of numerous visitors.

She is buried in Impington churchyard, but no stone marks her grave and no descendants remain in the village. It would appear that

her husband and family, wearied perhaps by the notoriety thrust upon them, left Impington after her death. Certainly her cottage and its contents were sold and people came from far and near to buy 'souvenirs'. A pair of nutcrackers purchased at the sale are in the Cambridge Folk Museum, but legend had already attached itself to these by the time they were donated: it was declared that Elizabeth used them to crack nuts while she was in her cave of snow and so helped herself to keep alive.

A monument commemorating her ordeal was erected near the spot where she was buried, but this,¹ having been defaced by the many visitors who went to see it, was replaced in 1849 by another, more imposing, which still stands today. The erection of the second monument, though it took place fifty years after the event which it commemorated, attracted large crowds of people, so imprinted on the minds of Cambridgeshire people was the memory of Elizabeth Woodcock. Josiah Chater wrote in his diary, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum:

1849. June 15. Jane Barrett has asked me to go with them to Impington next Tuesday: there is to be a large dancing party at Mr Saunders' to commemorate the putting down of a stone to the memory of Mrs Woodcock who was buried in the snow on her way from Cambridge Market in the year 1799 but I do not like to accept her invitation.

June 20. I went in to speak to Mary and she told me what sort of a party they had at Impington. There were 140 invited: 90 sat down to supper. Some did not get away till 4 o'clock in the morning and quite tipsy.

Hone, in the second volume of his *Everyday Book*, quotes two verses of a MS. ballad of Elizabeth Woodcock:

She was in prison, as you see,
All in a cave of snow;
And she could not relieved be
Though she was frozen so.
Ah, well-a-day.

For she was all froze in with frost,
Eight days and nights, poor soul;
But when they gave her up for lost,
They found her down the hole.
Ah, well-a-day.

The Histon Giant

Moses Carter lived from 1801 to 1860. By the time he was full grown he stood nearly 7 feet tall and weighed 23 stone and was so strong that he could carry a comb of wheat easily under each arm.

¹ This is now in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

He lived alone, for he never married, in what was little more than a hut built of clay bats,¹ and washed both himself and his clothes in Dodd's Pond near the Cottenham Road in Histon. His appetite matched his size and every week he made an enormous steak pudding, boiling it, with a great quantity of dumplings, in his copper.

Moses earned his living by growing vegetables on Histon Moor, pulling his harrow himself as though he were a horse. He was often to be seen in Cambridge with his handcart laden with vegetables.

Although so big and strong he was exceptionally gentle, especially with children, who all loved him, although his size gave opportunity to mothers to threaten their offspring, when they misbehaved, with the warning: 'You be good, now, or Mo Carter will cut off your head and put on a cabbage.' In this century Cambridge people have recalled that boys who were big for their age were teased for 'getting to look like Mo Carter'.

Moses was a great boxer and always visited Stourbridge Fair, where he inevitably defeated all who dared to stand up to him. Once, when the proprietor of a boxing booth refused to pay him the promised reward after the bout was over, Mo took the man by the scruff of his neck and hurled him out of the booth.

Once, when he had dug up a huge boulder, he was wagered that he would not be able to carry it, a bet which Moses won by lifting it up, taking it into the village and depositing it at the corner of the Boot public house.

On one occasion Moses disappeared from Histon and did not return for several days. When asked where he had been he replied that he had just walked over to Ely and back to sell his barrowload of vegetables there.²

Jeremiah the Highwayman

Jeremiah's Tea House in Little Abington and Lagdon's Grove, a wood near Bourn Bridge, perpetuate the memory of Jeremiah Lagden, highwayman. He lived in the eighteenth century, son of Emma Lagden, servant before her marriage to the Bromley family of Horseheath and later proprietress of the White Hart Inn at Bourn Bridge. She was a Quakeress, but she seems to have had few of the

¹ Clay bats were large bricks, about 14 in. × 6 in. × 2 in., formerly much used in Cambs. for building cottages, etc. They were hand made from local clay, which was puddled with water, then mixed with chopped straw and roughly shaped into bricks or bats and left to dry in the sun. Several houses containing these bats can still be seen, e.g. near Fowlmere, Shelford, etc.

² Information from Mr K. Oates and others of Histon. Mr Oates has in his possession a hat and a pair of boots worn by Moses Carter.

characteristics of her sect, for William Cole, the eighteenth-century Cambridgeshire antiquarian, who knew her well, wrote that she 'laid herself out to attract men . . . gallantry was her ruling passion'.¹

Jeremiah soon became notorious for his evil living. In his youth he was post boy at the White Hart—some say at Horseheath—and enriched himself with stolen money. He is later said to have robbed coaches travelling on the Newmarket to London road. In his later life he lived at the Old House, Little Abington, where a hiding-place in the wide chimney and a well under one of the living-rooms are reputed to have stored the money and jewels which he stole. In the garden is a vault known locally as 'Jeremiah's Grave', although it is his wife who is said to be buried there. Jeremiah himself was, by tradition, eventually captured on the Newmarket Road as he lay in waiting for the coach to come along, and was hanged in a field opposite his house. It is here that the ghost of the highwayman is said to have been seen. Certainly the name of Jeremiah was enough to arouse terror in Abington children well into this century.

Jacob Butler, Squire of Barnwell

Jacob Butler, a barrister-at-law and a man of many eccentricities, was the last of his family to live in the Old Abbey House in Cambridge, which his grandfather had built on the estate which he acquired in 1659.² As owner of the land on which Stourbridge Fair was held and as self-styled Squire of Barnwell, Jacob took particular care to see that the Charter of the fair was meticulously observed. If any booths were still standing on the ground after one o'clock on the day when they should statutorily have been cleared away, he would order them to be pulled down and the timbers, awnings, etc., confiscated. On one occasion he drove his carriage straight through a number of crockery booths which were still, illegally, on the fairground, breaking a large quantity of china and earthenware. On the other hand, he was equally careful to see that the ground was ready for the booths to be erected in time for the opening of the fair. He never failed to invite to Abbey House the giants and dwarfs who were exhibited at the fair.

Some time before his death in 1765, at the age of 84, Jacob Butler ordered his own coffin. This was a large oak chest—he was a tall, burly man 6 feet 4 inches tall—which he kept in the Abbey House, showing it to visitors, who were asked to join him in it to drink wine. In his will he left instructions that his two favourite horses, Brag and

¹ W. M. Palmer: *William Cole of Milton*, 1935, p. 21. Cole's MSS., including his *Diary*, his *Parochial Antiquities*, are in the British Museum Library.

² See under *The World of Magic: Ghosts*.

Dragon, were to take his body on a farm wagon to the church of St Andrew the Less for burial. If the incumbent refused to allow the somewhat unusual 'coffin' to be taken into the church, then it was to be taken back to the Abbey House and interred in the garden. His executors avoided any difficulty that might arise by having the chest conveyed first to the church, followed by Jacob's body, which had been placed inside a lead shell in a lead coffin. The chest was lowered into the Butler family vault and the lead coffin placed inside it.

Jacob's death is said to have been accelerated by grief caused by the death, a few weeks before, of his favourite dog. An old lady who died in Cambridge in 1960 at the age of 88 and who, in the first decade of this century, lived in part of the Old Abbey House, said in 1958 that she could recall hearing of a dog whose whining and howling could be heard in and about the grounds of Abbey House. This was shortly *before* the occupancy of the house by the family which saw the strange furry creature described under *Ghosts*. She remembered that local residents near by said it was 'Old Jacob's dog' which made the noise.

During his long life Jacob caused to be placed in the church of St Andrew the Less three large slate tablets¹ inscribed with biographical details of his ancestors and relatives. To these, in 1757, he added three others, setting forth, in the third person, his own life and activities, the dates of his own death and that of his life being left blank to be filled in later. With characteristic lack of false modesty he described his own virtues:

. . . it would be hard to decide whether his conjugal affection, his firmness in friendship or benevolence in charity truly Christian shone the brightest, for he was conspicuous in all . . . he was justly entitled to the name of Old Briton . . .²

Then follows a long list of 'his hardships and ill usage in life', which include his attempt to get Stourbridge Fair rated to the poor, his troubles as trustee of the Cambridge to London Turnpike Trust, and the legal actions he was concerned in and his attempts to reform the misuse of the common lands of Cambridge. At the foot of the last tablet he ordered to be inscribed what might be his own epitaph:

He feared his God
he honoured his king;
he despised his foes
and valued his friends.

¹ These now stand, almost illegible, in the churchyard to the left of the entrance gate.

² He often wrote articles in the *Cambridge Chronicle* under the pseudonym of Old Briton.

Tragedy in Burwell

A tombstone carved with a heart set in an aureole of flames still stands in Burwell churchyard above the grave of over seventy victims of a disastrous fire which occurred in the village in 1727. The following is an account given by the Rev. N. B. Borton, Rector, in c. 1774.¹

Some seventeen or eighteen years since a most dreadful accident befel this Town, occasioned by Fire after ye following manner: Some strollers passing through here on their way to Cambridge, it being ye time of Sturbridge Fair, had a mind to try their Fortune by acting a Play in this Town in order to raise some Money to put them in a Condition to come to Cambridge, & accordingly hired a Barn & had a very crowded Audience, as ill-luck would have it, on ye 8th of September, 1727, but before ye Play was half over, & Doors not only locked, but to prevent rude People from forcing themselves in after ye Actors had begun ye Play, nailed by ye Master of the Company for ye greater security, Fire was call'd out and no possibility of getting out of ye Barn by reason of every Body's crowding to ye Door, which prevented any single Person's being able to force an opening at it; meanwhile ye Barn, which was thatched, & built of wood, & moreover some part of it filled with Straw, was all in Flames, & ye poor unhappy People withinside either suffocated with ye Smoak or dead with ye Fright & apprehension of their deplorable situation before any Relief could be had from without, so that in a very little space ye Fire was so violent that it burnt ye Barn to ye ground with 72 unhappy wretches, who was in it, & who for ye major part were buried, as to what remain'd of them from ye Fire, in a grave altogether, very few being distinguishable by their respective Friends after ye Fire was quenched. Hardly a Family in Town but lost some one or more Relation or Friend. It was thought to have been set on Fire by a Person who came with a Candle & Lanthorn & with that got up to a higher part of ye Barn with desire to see ye Play for nothing, on ye outside through an hole, & that ye Candle caught hold of something, whether Straw or Thatch, which communicated itself so as to cause so much Destruction.

A MS. account of the fire, dating from soon after the inquiry into its cause, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, gives the man accused of causing the fire as one Richard Whitaker, an ostler. He came that evening to feed the puppet master's horses and, finding the play had begun and being unwilling to pay the penny admission fee, proceeded to the stable, which was separated only by a lath-and-plaster partition from the rest of the barn. Here he climbed into the hay-loft, carrying his candle and lantern, and threw down into the rack a quantity of hay which became ignited accidentally, as it fell, by touching the candle flame. As the flames spread the panic-stricken audience

¹ Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 102.

rushed to the door, which not only opened inwards but was securely fastened by an iron hasp and staple and was, moreover, blocked by an oval table on which some sleight of hand tricks had been exhibited as a curtain-raiser before the show began. A Wicken man, Thomas Dobedee, eventually managed to break down the door, but too late to save over seventy people whose 'mangled shocking relics were next day shovelled into carts and buried in two large pits in the church-yard'. Richard Whitaker was tried at Cambridge Assizes in March 1728, but he was acquitted of having caused the fire except by accident; indeed, it was shown that he was the first to raise the alarm, thus enabling the actors to escape unharmed.

Nearly fifty years later there was a curious sequel to the tragedy. In the *Cambridge Chronicle* of 19 February 1774 appeared the following paragraph:

A Report prevails that an old man died a few days ago at a village¹ near Newmarket, who just before his death seemed very unhappy, said that he had a Burthen on his Mind which he must disclose, and then confessed that he set Fire to the Barn at Burwell on ye 8th of September, 1727, when no less than eighty persons unhappily lost their lives; that he was an Ostler at that time at or near Cambridge, and that having an Antipathy to the Puppet Show Man was the cause of his committing that diabolical Action which was attended with such dreadful consequences.

¹ Fordham.

7

Games, Sports and Pastimes

Games

The games described below have been recorded from many Cambridgeshire people as popular in their childhood at the end of the last century or in the first two or three decades of the present one. Several are still played today. Of recent years many old games have had to be banned because of the risk of injury involved in playing them in overcrowded playgrounds, although they were freely played in a less safety-conscious age than ours in conditions far worse than those prevailing in most school playgrounds today. Modern schools have many and large windows, so some ball games have had to be discouraged in order to prevent extensive breakages of glass. Many primary-school girls bring their dolls to school and play with them during recreation periods, while the new 'Action Men'—movable figures of soldiers, etc—although costly, are popular with younger boys. Older pupils in some schools are now allowed to bring transistor radios into the playgrounds. But even though many of the more energetic of the old games are no longer possible they seem still to be remembered and from time to time one or more of them is revived until, if it proves dangerous to person or property, it has to be discontinued.

Present-day traffic conditions have put an end to many of the seasonal pastimes such as marbles, whip-tops, hoop bowling and roller skating which were once carried on in the streets. Hopskotch is still played, however, in suburban areas of Cambridge and occasionally children are seen on roller skates. The scooters—either all-wooden affairs or more expensive ones of metal with iron-tyred wheels—on

which many children propelled themselves along the streets in the 1920s are no longer popular. The increase in traffic and children's preference for bicycles have contributed to their disappearance.

*Badger*¹

This was played by a dozen or so boys who divided themselves into equal sides. One side then formed themselves into a 'vaulting horse'. One boy braced himself against a wall and the rest, one behind the other, all bent themselves at the waist, their heads well down and their arms round the waist of the boy in front. The other side, each in turn and to the shout of 'Two, four, six, eight—Badger', ran and vaulted from behind as far as possible along the line of backs until, when 'Badger' was called, all were astride the 'horse', which, if it could stand the weight or if one of the boys astride it fell off, was declared the winner. The two sides then exchanged positions. This game is one which, in some schools, has been found too dangerous to be encouraged.

*Bat and Trap*²

This game was played, mainly by children but also by adults,³ until the first decade or so of this century, particularly in south Cambridgeshire. It was a popular amusement at Sunday School treats.

The trap consisted of a solid wooden shoe, 6 to 7 inches long, in a central groove of which was inserted a spoon-shaped wooden trigger mounted on a pivot and with the handle extending over the toe of the shoe. The 'bowl' of the spoon was flat. The bat was a small cricket bat, about 14 inches long and flat on both sides. The ball could be any small hard one. Bat and Trap sets were commercially produced,⁴ but many children played with those which had been made by their fathers.

Any numbers of persons could play the game. The trap was placed on the ground and two boundary lines were fixed to mark the area into which the ball had to fall after it had been struck. The first player then placed the ball on the 'bowl' of the spoon-shaped trigger,

¹ This game is known in the north of England and in Hunts. as High Cock-a-lorum. In Hunts., when all the boys were astride the others, they shouted three times 'High cock-a-lorum, jig, jig, jig!' Information from Mr C. F. Tebbutt.

² This game is known elsewhere as Trap Ball. A similar game played in the north of the country is *Knur and Spell*. See article on 'Knur and Spell and Allied Games', by F. Atkinson, *Folk Life*, Vol. I, 1963.

³ See under *Calendar Customs*: Good Friday and Whitsun.

⁴ A bat, trap and ball set, in its original box and dated 1860, is in the Cambridge Folk Museum together with hand-made traps. Plate 34.

hit the handle sharply with the bat and then struck the ball, as it rose, towards the boundaries. The rest of the players tried then either to catch the ball in flight or retrieve it from the ground, the one who got hold of it throwing it back towards the trap from the spot where he had caught or picked it up.

The striker was 'out' and gave way to the next player if the ball was (a) caught; (b) did not fall within the boundary lines; (c) was not hit as it rose from the trap; (d) hit the trap when it was thrown back. The striker's aim was to keep 'in' until he had scored twenty hits or any other number previously agreed upon.

*Battledore and Shuttlecock*¹

The passing of a feathered ball or shuttlecock between two players by means of a small racket-shaped battledore is a pastime dating back to the fourteenth century, when it was often played by adults. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it had become a game for small children; examples of battledores and shuttlecocks used by Cambridge-shire children and now preserved in the Cambridge Folk Museum are of 1840 and later. These battledores are each made of two pieces of vellum stretched on a light wooden, leather-covered frame, the wooden handle being also covered with leather, as are, too, the wool and cotton-stuffed balls of the shuttlecocks. Today plastic battledores and shuttlecocks are seen in toy shops and on stalls on Cambridge market, especially at Christmas-time.

Blackawny

Mr T. F. Teversham recalls² that the game of Blackawny was popular in Sawston during his boyhood at the end of the last century.

In cold weather during a school break a group of boys would start the game quite spontaneously, the boy chosen to stand in the middle of the field at the start of the game being selected by applying the old rhyme:

eene deena vinah voh
catra veen vinah voh
o-u-t spells out goes *she*³

¹ Plate 33. ² *Sawston: The History of a Parish*, 1942, p. 288.

³ The 'counting-out' rhyme, to select a leader, a batsman, etc., in a game, now most usually recited by Cambs. children is:

Eeeny, meeny, miney mo,
Catch a nigger by his toe,
If he hollers let him go,
Eeny, meeny, miney mo!

This is repeated, each child being touched, and so retiring, as each word is said, until one player only remains.

The remainder lined up at either end and raced to and fro until they were touched by a boy in the middle and so the game proceeded until all had been touched.

Blind Hopper

W. H. Barrett recalls this game as a popular one in his boyhood in the Fens round Littleport. Five large concentric circles were marked out on the ground, each circle being given a name. The outer one was *Nick Nack*; the next *Belly Fat*; the next *Finger-Toed*; the next *Ring Bell* and the innermost one *Parson in the Church*. A player took up his position inside *Parson in the Church*. He was then blindfolded and spun round two or three times by his companions before he started to hop on one foot from one circle to the next, the rest of the players calling out the name of the one in which he landed. When he heard the name the blindfolded boy had to make a turn to the right which made him lose all sense of direction, so that his progress to *Nick Nack* was considerably delayed.

Buttons

Two Haddenham residents, aged 73, recalled in 1952 that when they were boys they used to play at throwing buttons, from a distance of four yards, into a hole in the garden path or in grass verges along lanes in the village. If the buttons did not land in the hole at the first throw, the players were allowed to flick them in with their fingers. The player with the lowest score of throws or flicks was the winner.

Card Throwing

Until the Second World War most children collected cigarette cards and it was common to see both boys and girls, but especially the former, adding to their collections by playing with the cards, often on street pavements in Cambridge and elsewhere in the county. A card was placed on the ground, often at the foot of a wall, and players then flicked their own cards at it with the object of covering it and so winning it. In the immediate postwar years it was possible to buy sets of cigarette cards and so the game continued until the 1950s¹. Recently, on three occasions, Cambridgeshire children have been seen playing the game with the cards which are given away in packets of tea.

¹ In 1966 and 1967 children in Cambridge school playgrounds have been seen playing with cards which had been given them by their fathers, who had saved them from their own schooldays, when such cards were issued with packets of cigarettes.

Chain Tag

This progressive game of pursuit is still played by both girls and boys in school playgrounds of Cambridgeshire, but less often than in the past, because it needs a good deal of space. Children not in the game are liable to be knocked down, so that many schools discourage the playing of Chain Tag.

One player begins to chase a number of others; the first one caught takes a hand of the pursuer and the pair then try to capture a third who, when caught, also joins those who have caught him, and so on until there is a long line of pursuers, pulling in all directions as they try to add more and more prisoners to the human chain.

Chasing the Sucker Man

A Cambridge resident recalled in 1966, at the age of 77, that at the Sunday School treats which he attended as a child one of the games played was that of chasing the Sucker Man. This man, often an undergraduate who helped in the Sunday School, had strapped to his back a large sack containing small bags of sweets. He was given a few minutes in which to start running haphazardly about the field and then the children, on the word 'go' being given them, started off in pursuit, any child who caught up with him receiving a bag of sweets.

Conkers¹

Every autumn sees the game of Conkers being played throughout Cambridgeshire—on village greens, in school playgrounds and recreation grounds and on the open spaces of Cambridge. The object of each player is to smash his opponent's conker, on the end of its length of string, by hitting it with his own. Various secret devices are employed for hardening the conkers and the number of times each succeeds in breaking another is carefully recorded, so that a player can boast that his is a 'twicer', a 'four-er' or a 'sixer' according to how often it has been victorious.

Fivestones

Each player in this game, which is still played by Cambridgeshire schoolchildren, has five stones which he throws all together in the air with the object of catching them on the back of his hand. Should any of the stones fall, then he has to throw up those which he first caught and, while they are in the air, pick up those on the ground and so try again to get all five on the back of his hand. The game is also known

¹ *Conkers*: a boys' game orig. played with snail-shells, now with horse chestnuts through which a string is threaded. *O.E.D.*

as *Jinkstones* or *Jinks*. In Sawston, when parchment was still being made there, children played with the small knobs of skin taken from the frames used in parchment-framing, preferring these to stones. Commercially produced metal or plastic 'fivestones' are now available.

Several sets of sheep's bones in boxes labelled *Kibbles* or *Jinkstones* are preserved in the Cambridge Folk Museum. These were used in the same way as the stones, the game being known as *Knuckles*, *Knucklebones* or *Knucklestones*.

French Cricket

This game is still popular with children aged between 8 and 12. The batsman stands with his feet together and the bat—cricket bat or tennis racquet, but preferably the former—in front of them. The bowler's aim is to make the ball touch the legs of the batsman, who may hit the ball with the bat, but may not move his feet. He may protect his legs with the bat placed at the sides and back of his legs as well as at the front. He is out if the ball is caught by the bowler or by any of the other players, or if his legs are hit. The ball may be passed quickly among the players so that the batsman is never sure from which side he is going to be attacked.

Here Comes an Old Man

This was a favourite game at children's Christmas parties until about the 1920s; tradition has, however, kept it alive in many families even in these days of more sophisticated entertainment.

The players sat in a circle, one of them being chosen to be the Old Man. He usually dressed himself in adult's clothes or put on a big hat, to make himself look as ridiculous as possible. Armed with a stick, he then hobbled round the circle, pausing at each child in turn and saying:

Here comes an old man with a stick and a staff
And you must neither smile nor laugh
But say, 'I will'.

He then asked a question such as 'Will you kiss the postman when he comes tomorrow?' and if the answer 'I will' was not given with a perfectly straight face a forfeit had to be paid.

Games at children's parties are not, according to several Cambridgeshire mothers, as popular as they were twenty years ago, modern children preferring often to watch television. Many of the old games are still played, however: *Hunt the Thimble*; *I Spy*; *Musical Chairs* and *Passing the Slipper* or *Passing the Parcel*. In this last game the

players sit in a circle and quickly pass round a slipper or parcel to the accompaniment of music. The one who is in possession of either object when the music stops drops out of the game. A similar game is played with a ring. A long length of string, with the ring threaded on to it, is held by the players as they sit in a circle. The ring is quickly slipped round and round on the string, from player to player, the one who holds it when the music stops having to leave the game.

Popular at parties where there are small children is the game of *Squeak, Piggy, Squeak*, or *Grunt, Piggy, Grunt*. One player is blindfolded while the rest sit in a circle. The blindfolded child gropes his way around with the object of sitting on the lap of one of the players whose identity he has to guess by asking him to squeak or grunt.

Josiah Chater of Cambridge, whose diary is now in the Folk Museum, refers to games played at parties which he attended in the 1840s and early 1850s, when he was in his late teens and early twenties. These games included *Postman's Knock*, *Cross Questions and Crooked Answers* and—these seem to have been very popular—*Conundrums*. At the end of the first volume of his eighteen-volume diary he has written out three pages of conundrums, doubtless to be asked at parties. Among them are:

Why is Westminster Abbey like a fender?—Because it contains the ashes of the great (grate).

Why is the Princess Victoria like a cloudy day?—Because she is likely to reign (rain).

Why is a man like a green gooseberry?—Because a woman can make a fool of him.

Why is the human mind like sealing wax?—Because it is capable of receiving an impression.

Home It

This game was recorded¹ in 1936 as popular with both boys and girls in Cambridgeshire early in this century. The players divided into two groups—hunters and hiders. The hiders then dispersed to conceal themselves and when the first of them was found he had to call out 'Home it', whereupon all the rest on his side had to rush to get 'home' before they were caught.

Hot Rice

This was played until a few years ago and is occasionally revived. Any number of players could take part. One was chosen to be the batsman and a ball was thrown towards him which he had to prevent

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

from hitting him either by jumping quickly to one side or by knocking it away with the bat. He was 'out' if the ball struck him or if it was caught after being struck. When the ball was in flight or on the ground the other players were allowed to run, but they had to stand still directly any of their number had it in his hand. After the batsman had hit the ball he dropped the bat and ran about with the rest. Any player who picked up the ball could throw it at another, the person being so struck becoming the next batsman.

Kick Donkey

The street game of Kick Donkey was recorded¹ in 1936 as often played by schoolchildren, especially boys, early in this century. One player was blindfolded and then led round by his companions, who gave him, at intervals, the order to kick the various objects to which they conducted him—lamp-posts, kerbstones, steps, etc. Eventually he would be led to a front door which opened on to the street and be told to kick out. The rest of the players then ran off, leaving the blindfolded boy to face the irate householder.

Marbles

Boys played in the streets and in school playgrounds until twenty or so years ago. The game enjoys a brief return to popularity from time to time now that marbles are again to be bought; the names of the various games which were played seem, however, to be largely forgotten. Few people questioned recall the game of Taw in which the players each put one or two marbles inside a circle chalked on the ground and then shot at them with other marbles with the object of knocking them out of the ring. This has in recent years been revived occasionally in tournament form by members of the Cambridge Oddfellows' Friendly Society.

Most people recall rolling marbles along the gutters with the aim of hitting an opponent's and so winning them. Alternatively the marbles were rolled towards a hole, any one which failed to fall into the hole becoming the property of a boy whose own marble succeeded in hitting it. The name *Pussy* has been given to this game by a Cambridge man who played it in the 1930s.

Platters

This game was recorded² in 1936 as having been played by children in Cambridgeshire at the turn of the century. Two separate piles of

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

all manner of odds and ends were made on the ground. Players then divided into two groups one of which, armed with balls, proceeded to knock down one of the piles by bouncing the balls against it. When the heap was flat they raced 'home' to the other pile, trying to reach it before the other side, which had been waiting at a distance.

A modern form of Platters has been recorded from a 21-year-old man who remembers playing it in a Cambridge school in 1954-6. Two teams were chosen and a pile of square pieces of wood, of diminishing sizes, was stacked up in a pyramid on the ground. One team lined up and each boy in turn threw a ball at the pieces of wood until the pile was flat. The team then scattered and the other side took over the ball, which they threw at the first team as they tried to rebuild the wooden pyramid. Any boy hit by the ball had to retire.

Skipping

This is still popular with schoolgirls up to the age of 12. A current fashion, recorded from a junior school near Wisbech, is *French Skipping*.¹ Two girls stand opposite each other with feet slightly apart. One of them ties the end of a piece of elastic round each of her ankles. Players then jump over and between the elastic in sequence, after which it is re-tied round the calves of the two girls and the jumps are repeated. The elastic is then moved to the knees, the thighs and finally to just below the waist.

Older people recall French Skipping as a circular game. A player stood in the centre of the ring with a long rope to one end of which was tied a cotton bag filled with beans. She then swung this, close to the ground, round and round the circle, each child having to jump to clear it, retiring from the game if her feet or legs were touched by the bag, which was spun higher and higher from the ground as the game proceeded. A substitute for the rope and bag was an ordinary skipping-rope whose wooden handle had to be jumped over.

Other group skipping games using a long rope, which have been known for many years, are still popular. Many, of course, can be played by children individually with a short rope. They include skipping, while the rope is turned increasingly faster, to the chant of 'Salt, mustard, vinegar, pepper', the child who stops the rope giving place at once to the next. *Half Moons* is played by a line of girls running one after the other through a long rope as it is turned by two others. The children then go through the rope again doing one skip, then

¹ Small children have been observed playing this game in Cambridge, etc., on several occasions in 1966 and 1967.

two, then three and so on, any player who stops the rope falling out of the game.

Calling In entails one player skipping, then calling out the name of another to take her place while she runs out. *Keeping the Pot Boiling* is similar to *Half Moons*, the children running one after the other through the rope as it is turned. Another game is that of skipping to the words

Apple, ginger, raspberry tart
Tell me the name of your sweetheart,

and then through the letters of the alphabet until the child stops the rope. A similar game, popular earlier in the century, was played by children skipping, either in turns through a long rope or singly with their own ropes, first through the letters of the alphabet, the letter at which the child stopped the rope giving the initial of a boy's name. Her 'bridegroom's' profession was then similarly indicated by skipping through the words 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief'. Her 'wedding day' was chosen by skipping through the days of the week; her transport to the church by the chant: 'Horse, Carriage, Wheelbarrow, Cart'; her clothes by that of 'Silk, Satin, Cotton, Rags'; their colour by that of 'Pink, Purple, Indigo, Blue'. Fast skipping was essential in order that the game should not be too prolonged.

Strike a Light

Thomas Case of Cambridge recalled¹ that as a boy chorister of King's College Chapel in the late 1830s a game similar to Hare and Hounds or Paper Chase was popular for autumn and winter evenings. It was called *Strike a Light*.

The meet was usually near King's Spring; the limit of the run was to St John's Ditch on the north, the roadside hedge on the west of the line of the ditch and across Garrett Hostel Lane on the east, with King's Spring on the south. Two boys started with flint and steel borrowed from home, or in some cases private property, and from time to time they had to strike a light, the sparks being the 'scent' of the hounds. After striking, the hares made quick tracks to pastures new, the object being to evade capture, and often the old elms were used for climbing, and sometimes the lower arms overhanging the path on Clare Hall Piece were mounted, and by dropping down head foremost with legs entwining the tree. A light would be struck at about the height a boy could reach, and by drawing himself up again he could sit and chuckle at his pursuers beneath.

¹ *Memoirs of a King's College Chorister*, 1899, pp. 57-8.

Payment received by Edward Case and his fellow choristers was in the form of a salary of 18s. a year, schooling, a daily midday dinner and a weekly half-quartern loaf with a pound of cheese, the loaf having to be fetched by the boys from the College Buttery each Saturday morning at eight o'clock. The boys were forbidden to use the main College gate, so they went by way of King's Lane and there, having collected their bread, they used to play *Long Poultis*—really a game of marbles—in which the loaves were placed on the ground to be poulted or bowled at by the others. On the days when lessons began at seven o'clock the game was played in the schoolroom.

Other games played by Case and his companions were *Five Holes*, *Seven Holes* and *Nine Holes*. In the first two of these five and seven holes respectively were made in the ground, some distance apart from each other, and the boys had to roll their marbles in turn into the holes, the player with the lowest score being the winner. In *Nine Holes* the marbles had to be rolled through a wooden bridge with nine arches in it.

Thread the Needle

A reference to boys playing Thread the Needle in the streets of Cambridge is contained in a diary, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, kept by two sisters in the years 1830–36. In this progressive game the players stood side by side, hands joined. The last in line then ran, followed by the rest, to the front and under the raised arms of the first two. The first in the row thus became the last and repeated the movement; the game could continue for some time in this way.

Tip-It

This game was played by W. H. Barrett and his contemporaries in the 1890s in Brandon Creek. Five squares, one within the other, the outer one being about 5 feet by 5 feet, were chalked on the school playground or a hard piece of level ground. The squares were named, from the outside to the innermost one, Noll, Poll, Soll, Loll and Moll. At 4 feet from one corner of the outer square was the striking pitch and on this was placed a concave piece of wood, 6 inches long and about 1 inch in circumference. This was struck with a round stick, 12 to 18 inches long, and so made to fly into the air. The aim was to get the wood into or as near as possible to Moll, the inner square. Each player struck in turn, the one who succeeded in getting the wood into Moll being allowed to follow on with another stroke. Points were scored according to the squares, one point being allowed for Noll,

two for Poll, three for Soll, four for Loll and five for Moll. The player who first scored twenty-five was the winner.

This game is obviously a version of the old game of tip-cat in which a batsman, standing in a large circle, hit a piece of wood, called a cat, with a stick known as a catstaff. If he did not succeed in hitting the cat out of the ring, he was out. The game was played in several Cambridgeshire villages in the last century, being often referred to as *Tut*.

Two Little Pigeons

Many Cambridge people now in their forties and fifties have been entertained, as very young children, by the trick of the vanishing pigeons with which their grandparents used to amuse them. The game is still kept in many homes as a family tradition.

The adult stuck two small pieces of white paper on to the second finger-nails of both hands. Seated opposite the child and with his hands placed palm downwards on the table, with the fore-fingers tucked under each palm, the adult then recited the following rhyme, wagging, as he began the verse, the fingers bearing the paper:

Two little pigeons sat on a wall,
One named Peter and one named Paul.
Fly away, Peter, fly away, Paul;
Come back, Peter, come back, Paul.

As he said 'Fly away, Peter' he raised his left hand to shoulder level and then placed it again on the table, this time with the second finger tucked under the palm, so concealing the paper, and the fore-finger straight. This was repeated with the right hand to make 'Paul' fly away. At the last line of the verse the 'birds' were made visible again by a reversed manipulation of the fingers. In some homes 'two little dicky-birds' sat on the wall.

The Wolf and the Sheep or Sheep, Come Home

This game is recalled, under both names, by several Cambridgeshire people who played it early in the present century.

One player, representing the wolf, stood apart from the rest, who all huddled together at a distance. The wolf then called out:

'My sheep, my sheep, come home.'
To which the others replied: 'We are afraid'.
The wolf: 'What are you afraid of?'
The sheep: 'The wolf'.
The wolf: 'The old wolf has gone away
And won't be back for many a day',

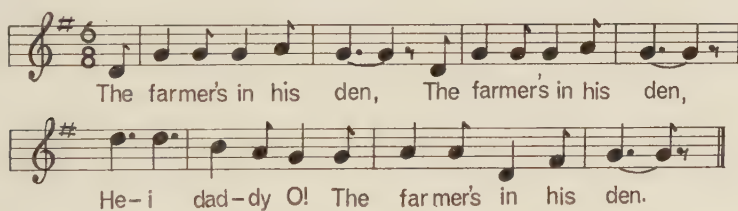
whereupon all the 'sheep' scattered while the wolf tried to catch as many as possible before they returned to the base from which they started. All those who were captured dropped out of the game while the wolf repeated his invitation until all the sheep were caught.

A similar game popular with primary-school children is *What's the Time, Mr Wolf?* The player representing the wolf stands with his back to the 'sheep' and at some distance from them. The 'sheep' then begin to move slowly forwards, calling out at intervals: 'What's the time, Mr Wolf?' receiving a suitable answer each time until suddenly, on the question being repeated, the wolf shouts 'Dinner time!' turns round and chases the sheep.¹

Singing Games

The singing games which form part of the curriculum of primary and junior schools in Cambridgeshire are often played spontaneously by children in the playground, in recreation grounds and in the gardens of their own homes. One which is popular out of school hours is *The Farmer's in his Den*, which is known to some Cambridge children as *The Farmer's in the Dell*.

The children form a circle, with the 'farmer' in the middle, join hands and dance round singing:

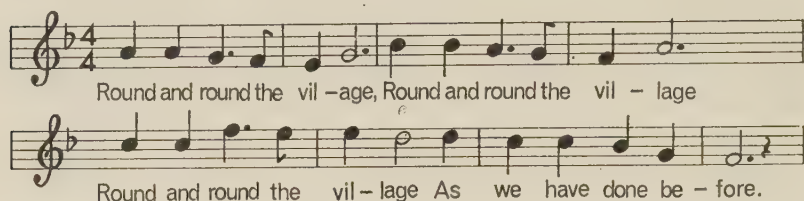


2. The farmer wants a wife,
The farmer wants a wife,
He-i daddy O!
The farmer wants a wife.
3. The wife wants a child, etc.
4. The child wants a nurse, etc.
5. The nurse wants a dog, etc.
6. The dog wants a bone, etc.

At the end of the last verse all the players fall upon the 'bone', who becomes the farmer when the game is repeated.

¹ Information from Miss M. Whitlock of Wisbech, who teaches in the school at Leverington.

Another ring game played by younger children on their own, especially in rural areas in the north of the county, is *Round and Round the Village*.



2. In and out of the window,
In and out of the window, etc.
3. Stand and face your lover, etc.
4. Shake hands before you leave her, etc.
5. Follow her to London, etc.

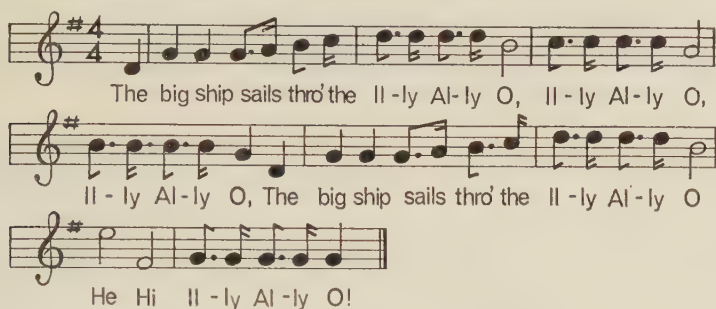
The players join hands and form a circle, one child remaining outside. While the first verse is sung everyone stands still except the child outside the ring, who walks round to the time of the singing. At verse 2 she threads her way in and out under the upraised arms of the other players and ends up opposite the child who is to be her 'lover'. At verse 3 she stands inside the circle with the 'lover'; at verse 4 they shake hands, while at verse 5 she is chased by the 'lover' as she threads her way in and out as before until she is caught. The 'lover' then goes outside the ring and the game recommences.

Probably as a result of the revival of the old songs *The Big Ship Sails* and *Lubin Loo* four or five years ago by the singer Frankie Vaughan, which meant that they were frequently performed on radio and television, the games played to them have become popular with children aged between 6 and 9.¹

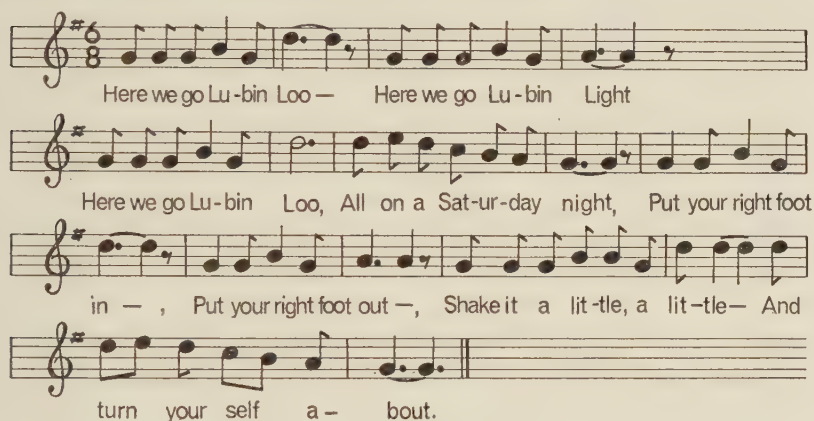
In *The Big Ship Sails* the players stand in a line, hands joined, the two at the top (Nos. 1 and 2) holding up their arms to form an arch. The child at the opposite end of the line then leads the rest, singing, through the arch and when all are through No. 2, still holding the hand of No. 1, turns outwards, releasing the left hand and holding, with crossed arms, the right hand of No. 3, so making another arch. This goes on until all the players are facing outwards with hands crossed. A circle is then made and the children dance round, still singing. The circle is broken, the actions are reversed, until all are

¹ On two occasions in 1966 and 1967 some Cambridge children, seen playing these games, said that they had been taught them by their mothers, who used to play them themselves and who had been reminded of them by hearing Frankie Vaughan sing the songs.

facing as they were at the start. Then a ring is formed and all dance round, at increasing speed, usually until they are out of breath.



In the game of *Lubin Loo*, *Lubin Light*, usually sung as *Loopy-loo*, *Loopy-li*—the appropriate actions are performed by the players as they dance round and round in a circle singing:



2. Here we go Lubin Loo, etc.
Put your left foot in, etc.
3. Here we go Lubin Loo, etc.
Put your right hand in, etc.
4. Here we go Lubin Loo, etc.
Put your left hand in, etc.
5. Here we go Lubin Loo, etc.
Put your faces (*alt. noses*) in, etc.
6. Here we go Lubin Loo, etc.
Put your whole selves in, etc.,
And shake them all about.

An elderly Cambridge lady recalled in 1938¹ a singing game played by her and her contemporaries in the late 1870s, although the name and the tune had escaped her memory. The players, she was certain,

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

stood in a square or a circle, facing inwards, and then one or more advanced, as in the Lancers, singing:

There came four knights a-riding, a-riding, a-riding,
 There came four knights a-riding, a-riding, a-riding,
 With a rantum, a tantum and a tizzany-tee.

This seems to bear a marked resemblance to the singing dance-game of *Forty Dukes*, with music by Martin Shaw, which was originally composed for the children's play *The Cockyolly Bird*. It first appeared in *Song-Time*, a collection of rhymes, games and songs by Percy Dearmer and Martin Shaw, published by J. Curwen & Sons in 1915.

Modern traffic has driven from the streets the hoops—wooden or blacksmith-made iron ones—which were once so popular with children. Primary schools, however, still use hoops of wood or plastic in Physical Education lessons, and younger children, especially girls, are often seen bowling them in playgrounds or, more often, spinning them round and round their bodies in an effort to keep the hoops from falling to the ground. This *Hula Hoop* game was especially popular, in Cambridgeshire as elsewhere in the country, in *c.* 1959.

The presence in the Cambridge Folk Museum of nineteenth-century stilts, diabolos,¹ spinning tops and cup-and-ball games² is evidence that these were once popular Cambridgeshire children's playthings. Walking on stilts is again becoming popular. Modern stilts sold in shops are brightly painted—a child was seen walking on a scarlet and yellow pair in a Cambridge hotel garden in July 1967—and so are very different in appearance from the plain wooden ones, such as those in the Folk Museum, which were often hand-made. A Whittlesford woman said in 1966 that she remembered the boys of that village, in the early 1900s, racing against each other on stilts up and down the village street.

Until early in this century most children were forbidden to play with toys on Sundays, although Noah's Arks, probably because of their Biblical associations, were permitted in some homes. The small metal figure shown in the background of Plate 33 was, for some reason, the only toy allowed to be played with on Sundays by its Cambridge child owner in the 1890s. The figure, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, can be made to move along a cord stretched across the room; it represents Blondin, the Frenchman who crossed the Niagara Falls on a tightrope.

¹ Another name for *diabolo* is the *devil on two sticks*. A double cone is made to spin in the air by means of a string attached to two sticks held in the hand.

² Plate 33.

Television and films largely influence the spontaneous play of Cambridgeshire children today and help to keep alive such games as Cowboys and Indians. Games centred round the television character of Batman are currently popular, while the great train robbery was re-enacted in play for some time after it had occurred.

Public House Games

In several Cambridgeshire public houses, e.g. the Blue Ball at Grantchester, the Fort St George in Cambridge, the old game of *Ringing the Bull* is still played. An iron ring, about 2 inches in diameter, is suspended from the ceiling some distance in front of an iron hook fixed in the wall at a height of about 6 feet from the floor. The game consists of throwing the ring on to the hook, which requires some skill. An old man in Hardwick, where the game was formerly played, said in 1938¹ that the secret of success lay in 'Taking off the hook yourself in such a way that it comes straight out of your hand again. If someone else takes it off, the ring'll spin round and the string get twisted.' He had been a keen player, his average score being 20 out of 21. It was recorded at the same time that the old game of *Skittles* was still being played in Hardwick with a circular, flat wooden 'cheese' to knock over the pins. Skittle alleys were attached to many Cambridgeshire public houses and they were also set up at village feasts, as at Whaddon, for example, where the game was played against the wall of Home Cottage.

In the Cambridge Folk Museum are flat, circular iron rings from Linton, Cambridge and Horseheath, which were used in the old game of *Quoits* played outside public houses and at village feasts. The rings were thrown from a distance on to an iron pin set upright in the ground. Horseshoes were frequently used in place of the rings.

In 1963 two 14-year-old boys brought to the Cambridge Folk Museum two pieces of worm-riddled and crumbling wood which they had picked up, with other odds and ends, in an outbuilding behind the Bell public house in Newmarket Road, Cambridge. The inn had been closed for some time and has since been pulled down. The boys had noticed some lines and small cavities scored on the wood and they wanted to know what these were.

The two pieces of wood, each 1½ inches thick, fitted together to form a rough semicircle 33 inches wide and 22 inches deep, joined horizontally by dowelling 11 inches from the extreme tip of the semicircle. They had probably formed part of a circular top to one of

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

the three-legged 'cricket tables' (so-called because they had as many legs as cricket stumps) commonly used in old public houses.

Incised on the wood were what appeared to be the upper or lower portions of two squares or rectangles set one inside the other, the horizontal lines of the pair measuring 20 inches and 15 inches respectively and the vertical ones running the length of the wood, at the extreme end of which were visible a faint trace of what might have been the beginning of another square. From the corners of the outer square or rectangle ran two incised lines passing through the corners of the other; a third line had been cut vertically from the top centre of the outer square. At the corners of the two portions of the squares visible on the wood, and at the two points where the vertical lines met the horizontal ones, small cavities, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter, had been roughly gouged out. These holes, as were the incised lines, were filled with dust, but showed traces of either having at one time been painted brown or of having been made with a red-hot poker. The pieces of wood were, unfortunately, too decayed to be preserved; a photograph of them failed to show clearly the incised lines or the cavities.

The markings, however, pointed to the table top having been used, in its complete state, for the game of *Merelles*¹ or *Nine Men's Morris*, an ancient and once popular game which could be played almost anywhere—out of doors on a suitably marked level piece of ground, in public houses and in private homes. Walls marked out for the playing of *Merelles* have also been found in churches, monasteries and cathedrals.

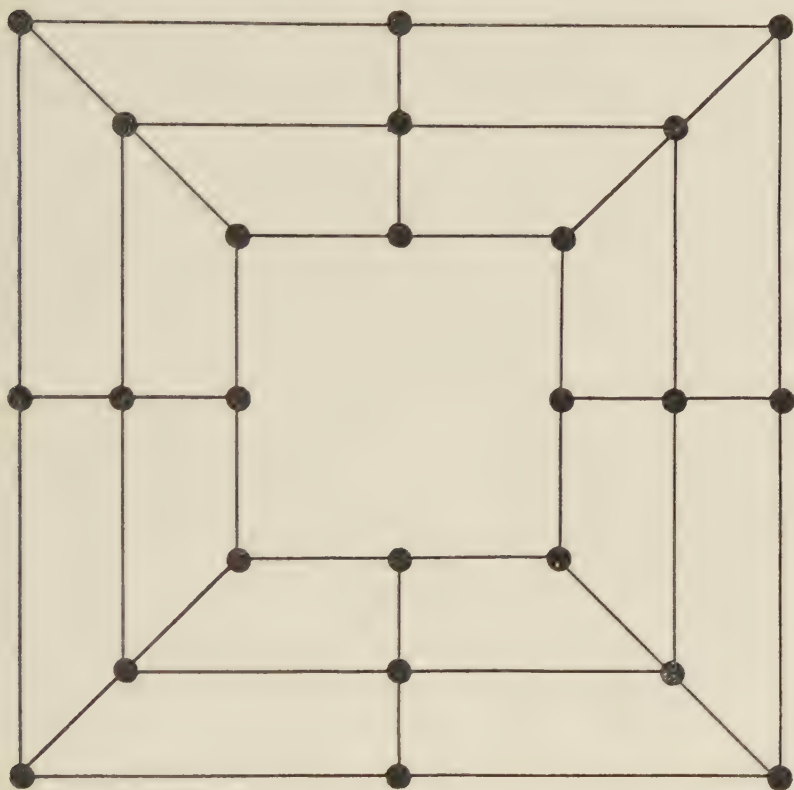
The Bell Inn certainly existed in the eighteenth century—it possessed a small, once probably elegant, entertainments room with stage and gallery, in which concerts were given until early in this century. Whether the game of *Merelles* was ever played in the inn is not known—inquiries made of elderly residents in the vicinity have produced no memories of it—but it may well have been. For use in a public house it is feasible that a *Merelles* board—the layout of which is illustrated below—should have been marked out in this rough-and-ready fashion.

The game, for two players, was usually played with coloured pegs on a board or marked table; out of doors coloured or variously shaped stones could replace the pegs. On the Newmarket Road

¹ Joseph Strutt in his *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, 1801, ed. J. C. Cox, 1903, refers (p. 258) to an article in the *Journal of Assoc. Archit. Societies*, vol. xi, pp. 127–31, which stated that the game was known in Cambs. as *Morels* or *Murrells*. These names probably represent the local pronunciation of the word *Merelles*.

fragments of wood the size of the gouged-out cavities suggested that they had been made to hold marbles.

Each player had nine pegs or stones, which he placed, one by one, in the holes with the aim of preventing three being laid in a row by



his opponent. When all the pieces were laid out they were moved backwards and forwards, one at a time, from one hole or peg to another, in the direction of the lines on the board, each player trying to get his pieces in a row while preventing his companion from so doing. When a player succeeded in making a row he could take one of his opponent's pegs, the one who finally captured all of the pieces being the winner.

Sports

Archery

Butts for the practice of archery by Cambridge townspeople were set up on that part of Midsummer Common, still known as Butt Green which extends from Maids Causeway towards the river. That there

was, in the seventeenth century, an archery ground at the other end of the town near the junction of Lensfield Road with Trumpington Street is known from an entry of 1657-8 in the Corporation's Common Day Book which refers to 'the Buttes at the Spittle house end'.¹

References to butts are found in sixteenth-century bursars' accounts of several Colleges, while the name Butt Close was given to the land on the west side of the river opposite King's College, Clare Hall and part of Trinity Hall, doubtless because archery was practised there.

University students of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries caused concern by their practice of carrying bows and arrows in the streets of Cambridge for the purpose of using them illegally in affrays with the townspeople. This was forbidden on several occasions, although the Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor could 'license scholars to carry and use bows for peacable purposes'. In 1571 scholars were ordered to 'provide them Bowes & Arrowes & exercise the same . . . accordynge to the Statute of Artillerye',² the order to be carried out by the Monday in Whitsun week.³

A bow and arrow maker was still working in St Edward's Passage in Cambridge in the 1860s. His name was Martin and he owned a field on the Grantchester side of Cambridge which was used as an archery ground. Josiah Chater wrote in his diary⁴ on July 5th, 1848, of a visit to the ground, describing it as 'a famous place'.

The green at Barton was used for the practice of archery, while in Ely a house in Fieldside is known today as Archery Cottage. Tradition has it that it stands on part of the city's archery ground.

Bandy

The game of Bandy or Bandy Ball, played on grass and a forerunner of golf dating from the fourteenth century, means to the Fenmen of the Cambridgeshire-Huntingdonshire borders a game to be played on ice—a form of Hockey on the Ice. It originated⁵ on Bury Fen at the end of the eighteenth century, the playing of it being confined to a radius of about seventeen miles. The Huntingdonshire

¹ At the south end of Trumpington Street, near the corner of Lensfield Road, was founded in c. 1361 a Lazar House (i.e. a home for diseased persons including lepers, *O.E.D.*), later known as the Hospital of SS Anthony and Eligius. The name Spittle-Ende, Spittle House Ende occurs on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps and plans of Cambridge.

² Stat. 33 Hen. V, 303.

³ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, V, 303.

⁴ Now in the Folk Museum, Cambridge.

⁵ Information from Mr C. F. Tebbutt, a member of the famous Hunts. family of skaters.

villages of Bluntisham and Earith formed a team which remained unbeaten from 1870 to 1890, although it was regularly challenged by teams from Huntingdon, Godmanchester and St Ives and from the Cambridgeshire villages of Chatteris, March, Sutton, Over, Cottenham, Willingham and Mepal.¹

The art of the game lay in dribbling the ball rather than in hitting it hard, so the sticks, of willow or ash, were light in weight in order that they could be held easily in one hand. Players looked for naturally curved sticks and when they saw any growing immediately cut them. When the game became known and played outside the Fens bandy sticks were commercially produced, many of them in Cambridge by the firm of Gray's. One such stick, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, has a length of rope twisted round the handle to rescue any player who might fall through the ice.

Not until 1882 were rules for the game of Bandy drawn up. In the winter of 1890-1 the game was introduced to Holland by the late Mr C. G. Tebbutt, when he took a team, which included three of his brothers, to Amsterdam, where he arranged a series of demonstration matches. The Dutch were enthusiastic about it. In England, meanwhile, clubs had been formed outside the Fens and it was at the hands of the Virginia Water club that the Bury Fen team met its first defeat. The victors, however, played according to different rules, so a conference was subsequently held and standard rules were adopted, after which more and more Bandy clubs were formed throughout Britain. The game was played in the Fens until the First World War, after which Ice Hockey replaced it in popularity.

Bear Baiting

Although bear baiting was forbidden by the University to be held within five miles of Cambridge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the regulation was frequently disobeyed. In 1581 a bear was baited in Chesterton, well within the prescribed area, attracting the presence of a large number of students. The University Proctors were sent to inquire of the bear-ward by what authority he acted; he replied that he had a warrant from the justices. This, the Proctors said, was contrary to University privileges and they ordered the man to accompany them forthwith to the Vice-Chancellor. The people of Chesterton were not, however, going to be deprived of their sport and a fierce argument ensued in which the parish constable and his brother joined in defence of the bear-ward, the brother going so far as to say that 'if Evensong were done when the scholars had gone they

¹ Plate 34.

would bayte in despite of them'.¹ The bear-ward eventually promised to attend on the Vice-Chancellor on the following day, but the whole affair was reported to the Chancellor of the University and, as a result, the constable was dismissed from his office.

Bears continued to be baited from time to time in Cambridge as late as the eighteenth century. In the *Cambridge Chronicle* of 30th November 1749 appeared the following advertisement:

This is to acquaint the Publick

That on Monday next in the Afternoon, the Great Muscovy Bear will be baited at the Wrestler-Inn in the petty Cury, Cambridge.

P.S. The said Bear will exhibit many extraordinary
Performances Dec. 2, 1749.

The whole entertainment will conclude with a scene worthy Observations of the curious.

Bowls

Bowling greens were laid out in many of the Colleges in Cambridge early in the seventeenth century, when the game was apparently very popular. Sir Symonds D'Ewes, who entered St John's College as a fellow commoner in 1618, referred several times in his diary² to playing on the College green, which was not, it seems, reserved solely for the game, since 'jumping, running and pitching the bar' were also practised on it.

In 1595 the Vice-Chancellor had decreed that no student should go to 'common bowling places'. One of these may have been the 'green about a mile from Cambridge called Howse'³ which D'Ewes visited on several occasions, partaking of refreshments after his game at the cottage near by. The green was used for 'recreation of all sorts' as well as for bowls.

A Bowls Association was formed in Cambridge in 1927, while in 1930 the Cambridge and County Bowling Club began playing in the former Avenue Meadow in Brooklands Avenue. Earlier in the century and at the end of the last there were several private greens in Cambridge and Chesterton, and in the 1880s local tradesmen formed a bowling club known as the Tenth Club, a photograph of whose members may be seen on Plate 68.

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, III, 384-5.

² *College Life in the Time of James I as illustrated by An Unpublished Diary of Sir Symonds D'Ewes, Bt. & M.P.*, ed. J. H. Marsden, 1851. The original diary was found in an old library in Colchester Castle, but had already, by 1851, been missing for many years.

³ *Howes*: formerly a hamlet between Cambridge and Girton.

Bull Baiting

In the Cambridge Town Treasurers' Accounts for the year ended Michaelmas 1604 are the following entries:

Item, for making bulringe	lljs xj ^d
Item, for 63 ¹¹ of lead & a stone to fasten yt in	ixs vj ^d
Item, for a bushell of stons to pave about yt	iiij ^d
Item, for pavinge yt	x ^d

The ring was on the Peas Hill. The statutes of James I of the same year forbade bull baiting within five miles of Cambridge, but in defiance of this the ring was again set up in 1633, when

Item, for settinge up the Bull ringe	xv ^d
--------------------------------------	-----------------

occurs in the Town Treasurers' Accounts.

In 1662 the sum of 9s. 6d. was paid 'for setting down ye Bull ring on ye pease hill'.

In 1620

. . . a famous Bull arrived in Cambridge and it was intended that it should be baited at Gogmagog Hills where bowling, running, jumping, shooting and wrestling were to be practised for a month or six weeks, under the designation of the Olympic Games.

D'Ewes, who recorded this in his diary, added that when he and his tutor were returning from a ride they came past the hills and saw that booths had been erected in preparation for the event. A little later, however, they met the Vice-Chancellor 'on his way, as many supposed, to hinder these vain and needless proceedings'.¹

Bulls continued to be baited, both on Peas Hill and from time to time at Stourbridge Fair, throughout the seventeenth century. Hock-tide—the period immediately following Easter—was the most popular time for the sport to be practised on Peas Hill. Bowtell² writes of

. . . this plebeian diversion . . . when many of the students were too often tempted to join the vulgar throng at the head of whom there were usually assembled a certain description of savages called *Bull-haukers* who plumed themselves on the merit of producing the best taught bulls for the sport, and dogs also, the most valuable for their courage and dexterity in spinning the poor animal at the stake.

To this he adds a footnote:

The spinning of a bull is a term applied by amateurs of the sport when a dog has seized his combatant by the nose and holds him tight to the ground with apparent ease.

¹ *College Life in the Time of James I* . . . , p. 110.

² MS. *History of the Town of Cambridge* (Downing Coll. Lib.).

Camp Ball

In many Cambridgeshire villages—e.g. Sawston, Abington, Whittlesford, Thetford—the name *Camping Close* recalls the contests of Camp Ball or Camping which used to be held there. It is significant that these Closes were for long the scene of children's games, as, for example, the Whittlesford Shrove Tuesday game of *Pig in the Gutter* described under *Calendar Customs*. In Wilburton there is a Champion's Field, while a Camping Close House in Ely adjoins a football field.

In Joseph Strutt's *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*¹ is a description of Camp Ball as given by a Major More in 1823:²

Goals were pitched 150 to 200 yards apart, formed of the thrown-off clothes of the competitors. Each party has two goals, 10 to 15 yards apart. The parties, 10 to 15 a side, stand in a line facing their own goals and each other, at 10 yards distance, midway between the goals and nearest that of their adversaries. An indifferent spectator throws up the ball—the size of a cricket ball—midway between the confronted players, whose object is to seize and convey it between their own goals. The shock of the first onset to catch the ball is very great; if the player who seizes it speeds home pursued by his opponents, through whom he has to make his way, aided by the jostlings of his own side. If caught and held, he throws the ball . . . to a comrade who, if it be not arrested in its course, or be jostled away by his eager foes, catches it and hurries home, winning the notch or snotch if he continues to carry—not throw—it between the goals. A holder of the ball caught with it in his possession loses a snotch. At the loss of each of these the game recommences, after a breathing time. Seven or nine snatches are the game, and these it will sometimes take two or three hours to win. At times it will sometimes take two or three hours to win. At times a large football was used, and the game was then called 'kicking camp', and if played with shoes on was termed 'savage camp'.

That Camp Ball was a form of football, at any rate in the Fens between Littleport and Ely in the seventeenth century, is evident from the following extract from documents relating to the drainage of the Bedford Level now in the County Record Office.

On June 6th, 1638, Edward Powell, *alias* Anderson, was prosecuted for instigating riots in the Fens which resulted in the banks raised by the Bedford Level Commissioners being destroyed:

Informacon of Willyam Goates of Littleport.

The informer sayth that he, meeting Robert Baxter of Littleport, laborer, he said Baxter toweld him that there was a footballe playe or campe to be holden in Whelpmore, and this informant asked him 'What, is it Saye's Campe?' and the said Baxter answered. 'Noe, it will be Anderson's Campe.' And this informant replied, 'What, doth

¹ Ed. J. C. Cox, 1903, p. 93.

² *Notes & Queries*, Ser. VIII. ii. 214.

Anderson mean to be hanged?’ and the said Baxter replied that Anderson would have first blow at the Ball and would bring with him from Eli one hundred men.

Informacon of Nucholas sayre of Littleport.

I mett with Pollard, Wilson and Will Howson and they asked me if I came to playe a game at footbale, to which I replied and asked ‘What game att footbale?’ and they told me Anderson would bring a ball and meete the towne of Littleport in Burnt Fen to play at Footbale.

Informacon of Roman Kinsey, one of the Constables of Elie.

On Wednesday morning last past I did see John Bryse with a camping ball and he did campe the same two furlongs into a greate parte of the towne and so camped backe againe and so carried it into Whelpmore.

It is probable that Cambridgeshire Camping Matches were inter-village contests.

The seventeenth-century game of football described by D'Ewes in his diary as played on Sheeps Green, seems to have been at times as savage as Camp Ball. He refers to the rivalry in 1620 between Trinity and St John's Colleges, when, on one occasion, the Trinity men found the Johnians in possession of the field and dared not venture on it. The same thing occurred a few days later, and the incensed Johnians ‘set on the back gates of Trinity College, broke them open and with long poles drove into the college all they found in the walks’.¹

Cockfighting

Reference has already been made under *Calendar Customs* to the cockfighting held on Shrove Tuesday on the Market Hill in Cambridge and in many villages throughout the eighteenth century. The even more barbarous sport of throwing at cocks, that is hurling sticks at the birds until they died, was also practised, especially on Shrove Tuesday. University students were prohibited from attending the Cambridge fights. That those responsible for upholding the law connived at the sport appears from the convictions of two Cambridge constables in 1759 for failing to report at the Guildhall on Shrove Tuesday, as the Mayor and Vice-Chancellor had directed, in order to arrest all those found guilty of throwing at cocks.

In the last century there was a cockpit in the Green Dragon Inn in Chesterton and cockfighting was also practised in public houses in Newmarket Road, as well as in fields on the outskirts of Cambridge. Shortly before the Second World War a resident of Cambridge received an invitation to attend a cockfight at Wicken.

¹ *College Life in the Time of James I . . .*, p. 95.

Coursing, Hunting and Horse-racing

Coursing has long been a favourite Cambridgeshire sport. Together with hunting it was forbidden to members of the University in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but was frequently practised by them to the great annoyance of farmers in villages adjoining Cambridge, whose crops were often ruined. In the *Cambridge Chronicle* of 1st September 1787 a notice was inserted by farmers of Grantchester and Coton who begged

. . . the favour of the Cambridge Gunners Coursers and Poachers (whether Gentlemen, Barbers or Gips of Colleges) to let us get home our crops; even after the first of September, without riding or hunting their dogs over our property . . . **THOUGH 'TIS SPORT TO YOU IT IS DEATH TO US . . .**

The Cottenham Point to Point Races, held each spring, are said to owe their origin to eighteenth-century undergraduate horse-racing.

A Cambridge man recalled in 1966 that his father, who was born in 1865, used to speak of 'The Straight Mile'—a horse-race track which was in use until that year. It extended from the corner of Walnut Tree Avenue to the corner of Park Parade and Park Street.

Fishing

From early times the owners of fisheries in the Fens jealously guarded and exploited them until, with the decline in the taste for freshwater fish and in the observance of abstinence from meat on Good Fridays and during Lent, their value grew less and their owners became less interested in preserving them from trespassers. Throughout the last century and during most of the eighteenth, therefore, anglers could fish freely in almost any Fenland river. Then, at the turn of the century, the value of the fishing grounds reverted to their old high level and from then on river board and angling societies exact fees and subscriptions as did once the lords of manors and other rich landowners.

The Fenmen naturally resented this. W. H. Barrett recalls that when old records had been consulted it was discovered that the fishing rights in the Great and Little Ouse rivers belonged to the Duke of Bedford. These were purchased and the new owner had notice-boards erected stating that the fishing was preserved and appointed the landlord of the Ship Inn at Brandon Creek as water bailiff to see that the new regulations were enforced. As a result the inn was boycotted and the landlord resigned his new appointment.

He was replaced by a retired policeman whose bicycle tyres, as he cycled along the towing path, were punctured by tintacks placed

there by the furious anglers. Then the old Fenman, Chafer Legge, took matters in hand. He arranged that a solid line of anglers would be found one Sunday morning fishing from the banks between Brandon Creek and Littleport. The bailiff, with the assistance of two policemen hurriedly summoned from Littleport to assist him, walked the length of the line taking names and addresses. On their return journey each angler solemnly reeled in his line at the end of which were old tins, bricks, old boots and nail-studded bicycle tyres. The bailiff was never seen again, and until W. H. Barrett left the Fens during the First World War fishing in Brandon Creek was free.

There are now many Cambridgeshire angling societies which meet and arrange competitions throughout the season, joined by anglers from London and the Midlands, on the Cam, the Old West River, Burwell and Swaffham Lodes and in the Ely-Littleport area. Pike, dace, bream and roach are caught; the eel-trapping once so important a part of Fenland economy has declined.

From very early times angling was a favourite undergraduate sport and, since the waters of the Cam belonged to the Corporation, disputes between the town and the University often arose over the matter of trespass.

It was the custom, certainly until the late seventeenth century, for the Mayor and Corporation to go on an annual fishing party in order to assert their claim on the river. The expenses of food, drink and the hire of boats were charged to the town accounts. In 1645 the Town Treasurers paid the sum of 12s. 'for three Boats at y^e Maiors fishing', while in the 1663 accounts occur the following charges:

	£	s	d
Item, paid to Moses Griggs for 5 boats & 3 men & two boys to draw y ^e nett at Mr Maiors fishing	01	16	00
Item, paid to Mr Wellis for wine at y ^e fishing	02	15	08
Item, paid for bread beere pipes tobacco & match at y ^e Fishing	00	13	06

On 23 March 1665 Alderman Samuel Newton was one of the annual fishing party:

Thirsday M^r Mayor M^r Recorder the Aldermen as many as pleased and some of the 24^{ty}¹ went fishing according to custome, they had 3 boates with netts, they drew Neuneham pitt, Cambr' mills pitt and soe fisht downe to Bullen² where wee had our fish drest, the charge of this—for wine bread cheese in the boate and after at Bullen, together

¹ i.e. the twenty-four Common Councillors of the Corporation.

² On Stourbridge Common.

with boate hire came to 5¹¹ of money, the mace did not goe with the Mayor none were in gownes, The mayor and Aldermen invited with them the Vice Chancellor then D^{or} Sparrowe, but he went not. . . .¹

Prize-fighting

Until early in this century prize-fights, for awards of up to £1 or so, were regularly held at the Tea Gardens in Newmarket Road, Cambridge. The participants were for the most part labourers from the immediate neighbourhood. Prize-fighting and wrestling² were, of course, a common feature of the Stourbridge and Mid-summer Fairs in Cambridge and of the fairs in Ely.

Ratting

Although ratting was primarily a rural sport, Richard Callaby, a Cambridge dog fancier of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, used to arrange rat hunts in Girton, mainly for the amusement of undergraduates, but also for any interested townspeople. According to the late Mr Noel Teulon Porter, there was, early in this century, a cellar under a house in Grantchester Meadows, Cambridge, in which undergraduates and others held rat hunts with terriers hired from Callaby. In the event of a visit from the Proctors the students could escape over the near-by fields.

River Sports

The use of the Cambridgeshire waterways for sport and pleasure must always have been conditioned by the state of the rivers at any given time. Pollution of the Cam and Ouse, into which sewage and all manner of refuse were deposited, was for long a source of complaint. Until early in the last century the Cam was choked with weeds and mud, so that little boating was possible beyond short expeditions in canoes and 'funnies'.³ As late as 1887 letters were being written to *The Times* on the unsavoury nature of the Cam waters.

Punts did not appear on the river until early in this century; by 1907 they had largely replaced the rowing boats for river outings and picnics. In the late nineteenth century large horse-drawn and steam-driven boats known as *party boats*⁴ were put on the Cam by Cambridge boat-builders for taking pleasure parties to Clayhithe and Ely and to

¹ *Diary of Ald. S. Newton*, ed. J. E. Foster, 1890, p. 11.

² Prize-fighting is still popular at the Cambridge Midsummer Fair. In 1967 two girl wrestlers appeared there. Fen women of the last century often engaged in inter-village wrestling matches, says W. H. Barrett, who can recall seeing them.

³ A *funny* is a long narrow outrigger boat sculled by a single sculler.

⁴ Plate 35.

the University May Races. These were later replaced by the motor launches which still operate between Cambridge and Ely.

In this century the Cam Sailing Club, the Ely Sailing Club and the Cambridge Motor Boat Club were formed and of recent years there has been a great increase in the use of the waterways for holiday cruising. In 1958 the Great Ouse Boating Association came into being, replacing the Fenland branch of the Inland Waterways Association which had recently been dissolved. The new Association's aim was to encourage boating on the Cam, Great Ouse, Lark, Little Ouse and other rivers.

In the 1860s bumping races between crews composed of Cambridge townspeople were firmly established, although there was a decline in the sport in the early 1880s owing to the counter-attraction of cycling, then becoming very popular. The town races are held annually early in the Long Vacation. The University Boat Clubs have always taken an interest in town rowing and not only lend racing eights but place their boat houses at the disposal of the town clubs and assist in coaching.

It may have been in the interests of undergraduates' health, in view of the condition of the river, that in 1591 the Vice-Chancellor and the Heads of Colleges forbade any scholar to go 'into any river, pool or other water in the county of Cambridge, by day or by night, to swim or wash'.¹ The penalties imposed for breach of this regulation were particularly severe. An undergraduate, for the first offence, was to be publicly whipped in the Hall of his College and, again, on the following day in the Schools. For a second offence he was to be expelled. A Bachelor of Arts who disobeyed the order was to be put in the stocks in his College Hall, not being released until he had paid a fine of 10s. He, too, was expelled if he offended a second time. Masters of Arts were to be severely punished at the judgement of the Masters of their Colleges.

A bathing pool was built at Christ's College, in the south-east corner of the Fellows' Garden, some time between 1688 and 1763, and there is another, built in the seventeenth century, in a corner of the Fellows' Garden of Emmanuel College.

Early in the last century bathing places and sheds were provided at Newnham, near Sheeps Green, with ladders leading from the banks into the water. Townsmen and University men bathed there;² later a bathing place was made for women. Josiah Chater of Cambridge wrote often in his diary of going for an early-morning swim at

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 227.

² And also in Bryon's Pool at Grantchester.

Newnham, while in the 1830s the boy choristers of King's College Chapel measured their prowess in swimming by their progression from shallow to deeper water, marked by various landmarks: Stony Gap, New Ladder, and, in the deepest part, Old Ladder on the island which Thomas Case¹ refers to as Bunker's Hill. The beginners' bathing place, known as 'Snobs'—which Case calls 'Snobs' Tree'—is in a diversion of the river.

When only all-male bathing was provided for at Newnham the presence of semi-nude swimmers often proved embarrassing to Victorian and Edwardian ladies as they were rowed towards Grantchester. The late Gwen Raverat,² recalling in *Period Piece* (1942) the river picnics of her childhood in the 1890s, wrote:

All summer, Sheep's Green and Coe Fen were pink with boys, as naked as God made them. . . . Now to go Up River, the goal of all the best picnics, the boats had to go by the bathing places. . . . The gentlemen were set to the oars and each lady unfurled a parasol and, like an ostrich, buried her head in it, and gazed earnestly into its silken depth, until the crisis was past, and the river was decent again.

The children in the party were, she remembers, sometimes sent on ahead, before the bathing sheds were reached, to be picked up further on in order to shield them from so terrible a sight. On the occasions that they rowed with their elders

I—but not Charles (her brother)—which was so unfair—was given a parasol and told to put it up and not to look 'because it was horrid'.

It has for some time been the custom to hold an annual 'Swim Through' series of races in summer from Newnham Pool to just short of Jesus Locks, schoolchildren and adults competing.

Shooting and Wildfowling

Reference is made under *University Customs* to the comparative ease with which the eighteenth-century sportsman and his predecessors could shoot in the immediate neighbourhood of Cambridge on land which, in the last century, was drained and built upon. It was the Fens, however, round Swaffham, Bottisham, Wicken, Reach, Lode, Burwell and Fordham which enticed the greatest number of sportsmen in the pursuit of snipe, mallard, duck, widgeon and teal.

Before the great inland meres such as those of Soham and Whittlesey were drained, professional wildfowlers³ worked from punts

¹ *Memoirs of a King's College Chorister*, 1899, p. 4.

² A granddaughter of Charles Darwin.

³ Plate 36.

mounted with 7-foot-long guns in the bows. These are now confined to the coastal estuaries. The gunner, lying flat in the boat and using his hands as paddles and a screen of bushes as cover, drifted close to the birds, a single shot from the gun bringing down as many as forty duck. When the meres were frozen in winter the guns were mounted on sledges which were camouflaged with reeds and propelled by the gunner by means of two iron-shoed sprits. Enthusiastic amateurs occasionally tried their hand at punt-gunning, but it was a difficult and sometimes dangerous sport, since the recoil of the gun could break a collar-bone.

Skating

Tradition has always claimed the Fens as the birthplace of skating in England. It is probably true that from the earliest times Fenmen slid over the frozen wastes and meres by means of animal bones attached to their shoes, in much the same way as was noted by Fitzstephens in 1180 when he wrote of Londoners sliding on animal bones on the Thames. There is no evidence, however, that true skating on bladed skates was practised in the Fens until the seventeenth century at the earliest. The people of the Low Countries used bladed skates in the fourteenth century and artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have portrayed Lowlanders using skates with upturned points to the blades which are very similar to the earliest-known Fen skates.

Members of the Court of Charles II, exiled in the Netherlands, learned to skate and on their return to London after the Restoration displayed their new accomplishment in St James's Park. Samuel Pepys saw them and wrote in his diary on 21st December 1662:

Over the Parke where I first in my life, it being a great frost, did see people sliding with their skeates which is a very pretty art.

Although the diarist visited Cambridgeshire on several occasions, he nowhere records seeing skates in use anywhere in the county.

It is probable that the Dutch who came to assist Cornelius Vermuyden in the seventeenth century drainage of the Fens introduced bladed skates, together with the name, to the Fen dwellers. The word *patten*¹—used by old Fenmen, particularly those in the north and east of the Fens—is traditionally said to have been acquired

¹ *Patten*: 1. A kind of overshoe worn to raise the ordinary shoes out of the mud and wet; consisting of a wooden sole mounted on an iron, oval ring, or the like, by which the wearer is raised an inch or two from the ground. 2. (*local or alien*). A skate 1617. *O.E.D.*

from the Protestant refugees from Flanders who settled in part of the reclaimed fenland around Thorney in the seventeenth century. The word was, however, only used as a noun, never as a verb, and was used probably because of the resemblance of the iron-bladed wooden skates to the pattens commonly worn by country women when walking in muddy streets and lanes.

The oldest known Fen skates are of the eighteenth century. Some—a pair in the Cambridge Folk Museum, for example—were made entirely of iron. Others, the co-operative product of blacksmith and carpenter, had wooden footrests and iron blades, with a screw at the heel for attachment to the boot and three small spikes at the fore-end to keep the foot from sliding sideways.¹ Some blacksmiths became well known for their skates, men such as John Goode of Whittlesey who made many pairs of *Whittlesey Runners* in the eighteenth century. The name *Runner* or *Fen Runner* is still used by many elderly Cambridgeshire people for the old-fashioned skate with its upturned blade.

Whether racing was ever practised on the animal bones which were used as a means of getting about on the ice is not known. It may well have been. Certainly contests on bladed skates became increasingly popular in the eighteenth century. Local farmers offered as prizes sides of beef and bacon, barrels of beer, legs of mutton, purses of money, fat pigs and red flannel petticoats. These last were to be skated for by the many village women who entered the contests, although skating by women of the middle and upper classes was not considered 'respectable' until well into the nineteenth century.

Local races came to be organised all over the Fens; then larger district meetings were held, the winners travelling further and further afield, until, if the ice held long enough, a champion of the whole of the Fens emerged. These matches became known and reported outside Fenland. The *British Magazine* of February 4th, 1763, reported:

A few days ago Mr John Lamb and Mr George Farmer of Wisbeach ran a skaiting match from hence to Whittlesea for ten guineas a side, which was won by Mr Lamb who skaited it in 46 minutes, being 15 measured miles.

In the severe winters of 1820 and the following years some famous Cambridgeshire champions emerged: the Drakes of Chatteris, John and James Egar of Thorney, Perkins and Cave of Sutton. Then, in the 1850s, came the great Welney² skaters: William ('Turkey') Smart and his nephews George ('Fish'),³ Jarman and James Smart; 'Gutta-

¹ Plate 370.

² Welney is a village lying partly in Cambs. and partly in Norfolk.

³ Plate 39.

Percha' See, so nicknamed for his toughness, and his sons George and Isaac. The greatest of these, probably, was 'Turkey', who died in 1919 at the age of 89. For ten years he was the supreme champion of the Cambridgeshire Fens and not until 1867 did he have to give way to younger rivals. Even then he continued until 1891 to enter contests, although hampered by a scythe injury to one of his legs. He won considerable sums of money by his racing and, on one occasion, was urged by a clergyman to allow him to invest the money, since it was unsafe to keep it in the house. 'Turkey' told him that it was already safely 'in the bank', by which he meant, as he later explained to Charles G. Tebbutt, of the famous Bluntisham skating family, that he had buried it in the bank of the Old Bedford River.¹

The tracks of the races were marked by a barrel placed at each end with, perhaps, one or two more at intervals between them; the sides of the course were marked by swept-up ridges of snow and earth. Sixteen competitors would be selected and paired off, usually by the drawing of lots, to compete in eight races in the first heats. The winners of these were again paired for the second heats and so on until the final race which was run over a distance of two miles. The course itself was half a mile long, so the contestants, starting one each side of the starting barrel, kept each to his own side of the course, swept round the barrel at the end and returned down the other side, so skating round the track and finishing at the starting-point. The men wore thick woollen jerseys and stockings and either round fur hats or white linen skull caps.

Large crowds of spectators, many of whom had travelled long distances to watch the contests, lined the sides of the course. There was usually a band playing to entertain them, while sellers of gin, hot chestnuts or roasted potatoes provided warming refreshment. All the contestants, and indeed all Fenmen, skated in the style peculiar to the region—with heads and bodies bent low and with arms swinging vigorously from side to side. A photograph of a typical skating contest, held at Wisbech in 1891, can be seen on Plate 30.

In 1827 James Drake Digby of Cambridge, with others, founded the National Skating Association, and the first races promoted under its rules took place at Thorney on December 8th of that year. In the same year skaters from Lancashire competed with the Fenmen at Swavesey and were beaten by them.

From 1880 until 1933 nearly all the Championship meetings were held either at Swavesey or on Lingey Fen, Cambridge. Lingey Fen is

¹ Information from Mr C. F. Tebbutt, son of C. G. Tebbutt.

now drained and cultivated, so, since 1947, Bury Fen in Bluntisham, Huntingdonshire, has been used whenever weather conditions have been suitable for racing to be held.

In the 1880s Fen skaters entered the field of international racing, where it soon became apparent that, to compete on favourable terms with skaters from other countries, the long, thin-bladed Norwegian skates would have to be adopted. So the old Fen runners ceased to be used for racing purposes. It was also obvious that the lack of training facilities in Cambridgeshire, or even in England, meant that competitors in international races would have to be sent abroad for periods of training. To overcome the problem of keeping in practice during the summer months, James Smart of Welney designed two-wheeled roller skates for use on the roads, while, later, A. E. Tebbitt used a similar pair, but with three wheels, which he used on the roads and lanes round his Waterbeach home. These, illustrated on Plate 39, are now in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

In addition to the official Championship meetings held under the rules of the National Skating Association, local matches continued throughout the last century to be arranged throughout the Fens, and there was much rivalry between the various villages. The prizes of money or food which could be won were eagerly skated for, since they were particularly welcome in times of long-continued frost when work on the land was impossible and so no wages could be earned.

W. H. Barrett was told, some years ago, of an extraordinary and quite unofficial race which was supposed to have taken place in 1875 alongside the stretch of railway between Ely and Littleport.

A group of young Littleport men had had an argument with the railway officials on Cambridge station as to the speed of the trains between Sandhill Bridge at Littleport and the bridge over the Great Ouse just outside Ely station. The young men wagered that it would be possible for skaters to beat the 12.30 train from Littleport over this distance and, the bet having been accepted, they arranged for a number of skaters, among them Larman Register of Southery, then champion of the Norfolk Fens, to join in the race.

Register soon outdistanced the others, who, unable to keep up with him, dropped out of the race. When, however, he reached Adelaide Bridge, well ahead of the train, he found that railwaymen, eager for the train to win, had laid cinders over the ice. Despite the delay Larman managed to win by 30 seconds.

The young Littleport men, when they heard of the trick, vowed vengeance. Hearing that the Prince of Wales was to travel, a few days later, in the royal coach attached to the 7.30 p.m. train to Sandring-

ham, they told the skaters to gather at Ely, informed them of the plans they had made, and then invited certain important railway officials to drinks in the Lamb Hotel. The officials, in return for the hospitality, said that the young men could travel to Littleport in the rear coach of the royal train.

The train set off from Ely, but had not gone far when the driver had to pull up because a red lamp was being waved on the track. He slowed down, but then the lamp turned green so, mindful of the important passenger he was carrying, he gathered speed again only to see, two hundred yards ahead, another red light. Once more he slowed down and once more the light changed to green. On the fifth occasion that this happened the lamp remained red, the skater who held it having forgotten to change it, so the guard climbed down on to the track to see what was amiss. As he did so the young men, leaning out of their carriage window, heard the Prince of Wales, from *his* window, demanding in loud tones if the damned train was going to be all night getting to Sandringham.

In long hard winters in the past the frozen dykes and rivers of the Fens provided skaters with an easy and swift route between one isolated village and another. Incredibly long distances—up to seventy or eighty miles in a single day—were covered on skates, not only for the purpose of paying social calls on distant neighbours but for the sheer pleasure of speeding along the frozen waterways. Many elderly Cambridge people can recall skating to Ely and back as a normal winter day's outing.

Skating is in the blood of Cambridgeshire people and any prolonged frost, such as those of 1947 and 1963, brings them out on to the ice. Opportunities for holding ice carnivals have, however, been fewer in the present century than in the last. In the winter of 1890-1, for example, when Cambridge had fifty-five days of continuous frost, a spectacular carnival was held on the skating ground at Newnham. The *Cambridge Express* reported that the ground was 'brilliantly lighted with powerful arc lights and had been enclosed with canvas which was studded with myriads of Chinese lanterns'. Skaters in fancy dress danced to music played by the band of the 5th Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles whose players sat 'enclosed in walls of snow' in an improvised bandstand.

Roller Skating

Roller skating was a popular sport in Cambridge at the end of the last century and in the early years of the present one. There was a vigorous society, known as the Cambridge Roller Skaters, and several

rinks existed in the town. Occasionally fancy dress carnivals were held.¹

Tennis

The earliest known tennis court in the county was that of Corpus Christi College, where the walls of a building intended for a bake-house and granary were heightened between 1487 and 1515 and used as a court for the game of hand tennis. By the end of the sixteenth century there were courts in several Colleges and the game became increasingly popular in the next hundred years and into the early eighteenth century, when it lost some of its appeal. For Cambridge townspeople, until the provision of municipal courts, there were private courts in East Road and in Ram Yard, leading from Bridge Street.

In 1892 some tennis balls were found in the wall behind the tomb of Elizabeth de la Pole in Sawston Church. Elizabeth was the first wife of Sir Walter de la Pole—through whom the Huddlestons of Sawston Hall trace their descent. She died in 1423 and the tennis balls are thought to be contemporary with her death.²

Table Tennis, in its early form called *Ping-Pong*, became increasingly popular from the beginning of the present century. In February 1902 a tournament, arranged by the Cambridge Conservative Club, was held in the Corn Exchange, but the reporter from the *Cambridge Graphic*, who was there to describe the proceedings, does not appear to have approved of them:

The days of our boyhood seem likely to revive and marbles, whip-tops, shuttlecock and battledore may before long become the everyday amusement of young and old children. Seriously, though, are we not going just a wee bit mad over such an inane piece of nonsense? Ping-pong! Just think of it! Why, the very name suggests something weak and childish! Well, well, boys will be boys, and fashion must have its fling.

Rustic Sports

The contests which for centuries were a feature of fairs and village feasts continued in Cambridgeshire throughout the last century on such occasions as Coronations, Peace Festivals, Jubilees and other rejoicings. Some of them are kept alive today at the fêtes and galas arranged throughout the county in various money-raising efforts for charities, church restoration and similar objectives.

In the Cambridge Folk Museum are programmes³ of several

¹ Plate 40. ² T. F. Teversham: *History of Sawston*, 1947, p. 154. ³ Plate 41.

village sports arranged to celebrate the Peace of Amiens in 1814. At Soham, for example, there were donkey and pony races, a wheelbarrow race 'by Six Men blindfold', climbing a mast for a hat and the always popular Jingling Match and Pig Hunt. In the *Jingling Match* all the participants, with the exception of the Jinger, were blindfolded. The Jinger had a small bell which he had to ring incessantly for an agreed time—usually twenty minutes—while he tried to elude capture by the competitors as they located and pursued him by the sound of the bell. He won the prize if he was still uncaught when the match was ended.

The *Pig Hunt* involved the catching of a pig whose tail, previously cut short, had been well soaped. The animal had to be seized by the tail alone.

Grinning Matches were popular events, the prizes being awarded to the men who, with their heads pushed through a horse collar, made the most hideous grimaces. At the Bottisham Peace Festival a race was arranged for six girls under the age of 15, the prize being a holland¹ shift, while another half-dozen girls competed for material for a gown.

On the occasion of the Coronation of Queen Victoria in 1838 rustic sports were held on Midsummer Common in Cambridge, as they were in most villages of the county. Judging by the programme of the Cambridge events, now in the Folk Museum, the occasion was one of great hilarity. In addition to flat races, pig and donkey races, a wheelbarrow race, a *Grinning Match* and a *Jingling Match or Blind Buff and the Bellman*, there was a *Rolling Match* for a 'new hat and a Coronation neckcloth'. In a *Rooting Extraordinary* boys looked for sixpences in a tub of meal and, with hands tied behind their backs, retrieved penny loaves from a barrel of treacle. There was a *Dipping for Eels* contest and another for seeing which of twelve boys could first eat a pennyworth of biscuits. The proceedings ended, as did most such occasions, with a grand display of fireworks.

Pastimes, Plays and Entertainments

Tournaments, according to Dr Fuller,² were 'commonly kept in Cambridge'.

¹ *Holland*: a linen fabric orig. called from the province of Holland in the Netherlands. *O.E.D.*

² Thomas Fuller: *History of the University of Cambridge from the Conquest to 1634*, ed. M. Prickett and T. Wright, 1840, p. 25.

. . . Much lewd people waited on these assemblies, light housewives as well as light horsemen repaired thereunto. Yea, such the clashing of swords, the rattling of arms, the neighing of horses, the shouting of men all day-time, with the roaring of riotous revellers all the night, that the Scholars' studies were disturbed, safety endangered . . . charges enlarged, all provisions being unconscionably enhanced.

In the interests of the common peace Henry III in 1234, 1236 and 1246 issued letters patent prohibiting earls, barons, knights and others from attending the tournaments arranged to be held in Cambridge in those years.¹ In 1270, at the request of the University, he again granted letters patent forbidding tournaments, tiltings, joustings or any other warlike games to be held in Cambridge or within five miles of the town.² The same ban was later imposed by Edward I and Edward II. In 1245, in defiance of the orders of Henry III, Sir Ralph de Kamoy's 'kept a riotous tilting on the border of the town', for which offence his lands were seized by the King. They were restored to him, however, on his submission to the Earls of Cornwall, Norfolk and Leicester.³

The earliest reference to a religious *play* in Cambridge is in c. 1350, when William de Lenne and his wife contributed half a mark to the play of the *Children of Israel* on their admission to the Gild of Corpus Christi.⁴

On St Margaret's Day 1511 a play of *The Holy Martyr St George* was acted at Bassingbourn. Among the expenses listed in the churchwardens' accounts are:

Item, payd to mynstrelles and iij waytes of Cambrigg	v ^s	xj ^d
Item, payde to John Bocker ffor peynting of iij ffawchons		
& iiij tormentoures axes		xvj ^d
Item . . . settinge the dragon in expenses		viiij ^d

In Cambridge students were encouraged, and in some cases required by the Statutes of their Colleges, to produce plays. The earliest record of a College play occurs in an account roll of Michael House which lists, in 1386, charges for an embroidered pall or cloak and six visors and six beards for the comedy.⁵

Elizabeth I, a great lover of the drama, saw three plays performed in King's College Chapel when she visited Cambridge in 1564. In 1568 a play was acted in the chapel of Jesus College, while early in the seventeenth century a special Comedy Room was provided at

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 42, 43, 45.

² *op. cit.*, I, 53.

³ Bowtell MSS. (Downing Coll. Lib.).

⁴ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 101.

⁵ C. H. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 131-2.

King's College. Otherwise the plays were generally performed in College Halls, usually during and after Christmas.

In the months of January, February and March, to beguile the long evenings, they amuse themselves with exhibiting public plays, which they perform with so much elegance . . . that if Plautus, Terence or Seneca were to come to life again, they would admire their own pieces . . . and Euripides, Sophocles and Aristophanes would be disgusted at the performance of their own citizens.¹

Not only were the works of the great Greek and Latin dramatists performed, English plays, too, were acted, among them *Gammer Gurton's Needle* at Christ's College in 1566; Lacey's *Richard III* at Trinity College in 1586, and Christopher Smart's *A Trip to Cambridge or the Grateful Fair* at Pembroke College in 1747.

In 1597 the members of Clare College wrote an English comedy called *Club Law* to a performance of which they invited the Mayor and Corporation of Cambridge with their wives.

A convenient place was assigned to the townsfolk (rivetted in with scholars on all sides) where they might see and be seen. Here they did behold themselves in their own best clothes (which the scholars had borrowed) so lively personated . . . it was hard to decide which was the true townsman, whether he that sat by, or he who acted on the stage.²

The townspeople, unable to get out of the hall, were forced to watch themselves mercilessly ridiculed, the cruel joke being due, apparently, to some wrong, real or imaginary, done by them to the undergraduates.

Plays continued to be acted in Colleges until the eighteenth century. The town of Cambridge, meanwhile, had from the sixteenth century entertained, from time to time, groups of players who formed part of the households of various members of the royal family or of the nobility. The Town Treasurers' Accounts contain many entries of expenses incurred in connection with such visits: e.g. in 1538:

Item, payd to the Kyngs Players by commandement of Mr Mayor	vjs viij ^d
Item, for a Juncket ³ of the said players	xvj ^d
Item, to the Duke of Southfolkes players	v ^s

and in 1562:

Item, to y ^e Lord of Oxfords players	xx ^s
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¹ From a letter written by William Soone to George Bruin *alias* Braun, compiler of . . . *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, pub. in Cologne, 1575. The English translation of Soone's letter, which contained in effect a concise history of Cambridge, appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. XLVI, for the year 1776, pp. 201-3.

² C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 588.

³ *Junket*: . . . a feast or banquet. *O.E.D.*

Plays were acted, too, in the yards of inns in the town—at the Falcon and the Saracen's Head in 1556, while in 1600 an Interlude was performed at the Black Bear Inn. In this appeared a graduate of Corpus Christi College 'with an improper habit, having deformed long locks of unseemly sight, and great breaches undecent for a graduate or scholar of orderly carriage',¹ for which offence he was ordered by the University authorities to get his hair cut and was further forbidden to proceed with his studies.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century an attempt was made to provide entertainment for the large numbers of merchants, traders and others who visited Stourbridge Fair each year. The University became alarmed and appealed to the Privy Council, who, in 1575, ordered that no plays were to be acted within five miles of Cambridge. In 1592, however, despite a further order from the Vice-Chancellor and the Justices of the Peace forbidding any performances in Chesterton during the time of the fair, a play was acted there with the support of Lord North, then High Steward of Cambridge, who maintained that the 1575 ban had expired.

In 1710 the Mayor and Corporation gave permission to a company of actors to perform at the fair. This so angered the University that sixty-two Masters of Arts were hastily sworn in as Proctors and dispatched to the fairground to break up the theatrical booth and to arrest the chief actor.

The University was again defied in 1737, when a certain Joseph Kettle built a playhouse within the University precincts and used it for performances. A petition was sent to the House of Commons and assent obtained for a Bill prohibiting all plays and interludes outside the Colleges. Some years later another attempt to build a theatre in Cambridge was made by Charles Day, who, in 1790, erected one on the site of the present gates and Porter's Lodge of Downing College. He was never able, however, to obtain a licence to use it, and the building, after standing empty for some years during which time it acquired the name of *Day's Folly*, was finally demolished.

Despite the incident at Stourbridge Fair in 1710, plays continued to be acted there. The *Cambridge Journal and Flying Post* of 17th September 1748 records the visit of a company of London players who gave a pantomime *Harlequin's Frolics or Jack Spaniard Caught in a Trap* in Hussey's Great Theatrical Booth at the end of Garlic Row, while in 1772 performances of *The Clandestine Marriage*, *The West Indian* and other plays were given in Stevens's Theatrical Booth in the Cheese Fair.

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 598.

By the late eighteenth century a theatre known as the Stirbitch Theatre—the name being nearly always so spelt on its programmes—seems to have been erected as a permanent building on the site of cottages in Newmarket Road which later were called Shakespeare Cottages. Here plays were performed during the time of Stourbridge Fair by a touring company from Norwich. Gunning in his *Reminiscences* refers to the crowds which flocked to the theatre, many of them members of the University, among them Dr Farmer, Master of Emmanuel College, who, with his friends, regularly occupied the front row of the pit.

In 1806 the Stirbitch Theatre was replaced by the Barnwell Theatre Royal, still in Newmarket Road, since the University remained adamant on the matter of theatrical performances within the boundaries of Cambridge as they then existed. Another Theatre Royal replaced the original one in 1816, and this had a long and prosperous career until the 1860s, when it was converted for use as a mission hall. In 1926 Terence Gray turned the hall back to its original use as a theatre—the Festival Theatre—which survived until financial difficulties caused it to be closed in 1934.

Early in the nineteenth century amateur dramatic clubs began to arise in Cambridge, although the lives of some of them were short. The earliest was the *Shakespeare Club* of 1830, which survived until 1834, when it was followed, until 1842, by the Garrick Club, which was, in turn, succeeded by the Shakespeare Society and the Sheridan Society. In 1855 the Amateur Theatrical Society was established. The plays produced by these groups were all performed at the Theatre Royal, Barnwell.

In 1875 W. B. Redfern established the *Bijou Amateur Dramatic Club*, whose plays were performed at first in the Victoria Assembly Rooms on Market Hill. Redfern was deeply interested in the theatre and was for three years Booking Manager at the Barnwell Theatre Royal. In 1882 he purchased St Andrew's Hall in Cambridge, which was then being used as a skating rink, and reconstructed it later as a theatre which he called the Theatre Royal, the one in Barnwell being then no longer in use. In 1895, soon after the University had at last lifted its ban on the performance of plays during academic terms, Redfern demolished the old theatre and replaced it with a new building which he called the New Theatre. This finally closed its doors in 1956 and was demolished in 1960.

In 1899 was founded the *Rodney Dramatic Club*, composed of members and friends of the Rodney Cricket Club, whose annual productions were staged, after 1926, at the Festival Theatre, and

later at the Arts Theatre on Peas Hill, which opened in 1934 and still exists.

Undergraduate amateur theatrical societies began in 1855 with the formation of the *Amateur Dramatic Club*, more usually known as the A.D.C., whose theatre is still in Jesus Lane. The Club owes its existence to F. C. Burnand of Trinity College, who set up a small stage in his rooms in Trinity Street. The first performance given there was so successful that an attempt was made to put on a play at the Barnwell Theatre Royal, but the University authorities refused to grant permission.

Burnand then heard that the University Athenaeum Club were going to perform a play at the Red Lion Hotel in Petty Cury, to which no objections were being raised by the University. This encouraged him in the idea of forming a Theatrical Club and of finding a suitable theatre. He was told that there had been, earlier in the century, a small theatre in Jesus Lane, since converted to livery stables, and that plays had been performed for town and county people in rooms in the Hoop Hotel in Bridge Street. These, however, were now used for billiards, but Burnand found that two other rooms over a stable used for storing beer and wine were available, and these he rented and converted. In 1860 the first performances were given. In 1861 the Prince of Wales, who was then up at the University, consented to be Honorary President of the Club, and he attended the theatre, inviting the Vice-Chancellor and other University dignitaries to meet him there. The A.D.C. was thus, by royal patronage, saved from being ordered by the University to cease its activities.

The still flourishing *Footlights* owe their existence to a cricket match which was played in 1883 between a team of undergraduates and the staff of the Fulbourn Mental Hospital. The return match took the form of a concert and from this the Club was formed. The first of their shows—which are always held in May Week,¹ was in the old St Andrew's Hall, where the Footlights performed annually until the hall was demolished in 1895. Then they used the New Theatre until the Arts Theatre was built.

For a short time in the 1890s the old Corn Exchange on St Andrew's Hill, which had been used as a shopping arcade following the opening of the new Corn Exchange in 1874, was used as a theatre known as the Arcadia Entertainment Hall.

Between 1895 and 1898 a Hippodrome was built in Auckland Road, near Midsummer Common, for the use of Tudor's Circus, with a small sawdust-strewn ring. Early in this century theatrical

¹ See under *University Customs*.

performances were given in the Hippodrome, which finally closed its doors in 1914, having been known for the last few years of its life as the Gaiety Theatre. Shortly before it closed youthful audiences were encouraged to attend Saturday afternoon variety performances by the offer of small prizes to those who brought the best-dressed and prettiest dolls.

In the early 1900s a touring pierrot troupe performed on summer evenings on Midsummer Common. Arguments between townsfolk and undergraduates became so noisy, however, that the troupe was forced to move to private tennis courts off Lever's Passage in Clarendon Street. A fixed charge for admission ensured a more orderly audience.

In many villages round Cambridge and Ely strolling players of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, on their way to perform at Stourbridge and Ely Fairs, gave plays and puppet shows in barns or in the open. The tragic outcome of one such performance at Burwell has already been described. The town of March had a theatre from the late eighteenth century until 1844, when it was converted to a British School and Mechanics' Institute. It was probably in this theatre that the performance of *Othello* was given in 1838 during which the following incident, reported in *The Star in the East*,¹ occurred:

In a small town not 40 miles from Cambridge a travelling company lately arrived to 'astonish the natives' and the gentle Desdemona of the dramatic corps consented during her short sojourn to domicile at a humble dwelling near the scene of mimic action . . . The humble cottagers received a complimentary card of admission and during the progress of the tragedy expressed themselves 'woundily pleased'. All proceeded well until the scene between the Moor and Desdemona where he taxes her upon the subject of the handkerchief, which he says 'An Egyptian did to my mother give.' This was not to be borne, and the bumpkin roared out: 'That's a natum lie, Maister Blackchops, Meary lent it to the poor thing to hact wi' it; I bought it mysen yestere'en—there be plenty more like un at John Tummass's in the High Street.' The effect was indescribable.

Moving pictures—misty, flickering and often breaking down—were a popular attraction at Cambridgeshire Fairs from the turn of the century. Audiences enticed into the booths by the announcement that the show was 'about to commence' often found that they had to wait a long time, for not until all or most of the seats had been filled did the show, in fact, begin.

¹ See Appendix I.

From early in the last century various forms of apparatus were developed by means of which a series of views representing closely successive stages of a moving object were shown in rapid sequence so that the picture seemed to be in continuous motion.¹ Such machines were known under various names, the *Bioscope* probably being the most common. Many elderly people in the county recall seeing on the Bioscope the funeral of Edward VII in 1910 and how thrilled they were by the experience despite the fact that the procession seemed to be moving along in a whirling cloud of snowflakes.

In 1911 motion pictures were regularly shown at the Electric Theatre (now the Victoria Cinema) in Cambridge and also, occasionally, in the Alexandra Hall. In Mill Road the Empire Picture Theatre opened in 1911, although, from 1913 until it became the present Kinema after the First World War, it called itself the Empire Palace of Varieties, presenting both films and variety shows. The Picture Playhouse, also in Mill Road, opened in 1913, presenting cine-variety shows at first and then films alone.

Among other entertainments for the diversion of Cambridgeshire people may be noted the tightrope-walkers, the jugglers and the clowns who came regularly to the county fairs. Dwarfs, giants and other 'living marvels of nature'—two-headed sheep, three-legged donkeys, bearded ladies and Siamese twins—all these, too, were put on show at the fairs. In 1846 the celebrated dwarf Tom Thumb appeared at the Cambridge Guildhall.

From time to time curious exhibitions were staged for the benefit of Cambridgeshire people. Madame Tussaud showed her wax figures in the Assembly Room of the Black Bear Inn which stood in Market Street, Cambridge, until it was pulled down in 1848. Among the items advertised in her exhibition was 'the most complete, truly wonderful and best conserved Egyptian mummy ever seen in Europe, 3,309 years old'.

In 1846 some Waxwork Anatomical Models were exhibited in the Cambridge Guildhall, while an undated handbill, now in Downing College Library, advertises an exhibition at the Nelson Coffee House in Cambridge of *The Accoustic Apparatus and Astonishing Invisible Lady*. This was stated to be 'founded upon real Philosophical Principles without the Aid of Ventriloquism, Speaking Figures or such like

¹ The earliest form of cinematograph was the *Zoetrope* or *Wheel of Life*, 1833. This is a revolving cylinder on the inner side of which is placed a strip of paper bearing pictures of successive positions of a moving object. An effect of motion is obtained by viewing the picture, as it spins round, through slots in the drum. The *Zoetrope* was a popular mechanical toy for children; one can be seen in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

Deceptions'. The lady, it was claimed, 'will hold Conversation upon various Subjects . . . and breathe close to the Ears of the Audience', remaining all the time unseen but 'performing in the Air by some unknown power of Enchantment'.

Concerts, Penny Readings¹ and Magic Lantern Shows were arranged all through the last century by Bands of Hope,² Mechanics' Institutes, the Young Men's Christian Association and other organisations up and down the county. Charles Dickens gave readings of his own works in Cambridge in 1867 and 1869. There were visits of Wombwell's (later Edmunds's) and Hylton's Menageries and of Cooke's and Van Ambury's Riding Circuses to entertain the people of Cambridge, March, Ely, Chatteris and surrounding villages. Punch and Judy shows were given in the streets and many elderly people in the county can recall the performing bears, the German bands and the Italian organ grinders with their monkeys as common and delightful sights in their youth.

¹ These consisted of the reading aloud of extracts from the works of well-known authors and were intended to be educational as well as entertaining. Admission to the readings often did, in fact, cost only one penny.

² The Band of Hope Union, with branches throughout the country, was formed in the last century with the aim of encouraging temperance in young people.

8

University Customs

College Chapel and University Church

Because the teachers and students who settled in Cambridge about the year 1200 were all Clerks in Holy Orders and because the education of the early University was conducted solely by ecclesiastics for ecclesiastics, it followed that as College after College was founded from 1286 onwards the Chapel was as essential to the life of each as was the Hall or the rooms for residence.

Compulsory attendance at Chapel was for long the rule, relaxed generally only after the First World War, although it was discontinued at Pembroke as early as 1898 and in some Colleges was less rigorously enforced before 1914. Failure to comply with the rule was punished by monetary fines. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries lax attendance on the part of both undergraduates and Fellows¹ caused some anxiety to Heads of Houses.² Dr Wordsworth of Trinity, for example, tried in 1824 to stir up the senior and junior members of the College into attending a minimum of five services a week, an effort which provoked the undergraduates to rebellion and led to the formation of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Undergraduates. When services in College Chapels are attended it is customary that surplices be worn on Sundays and on Saints' Days

¹ *Fellow*: originally one of the company or corporation who, with their head, constitute a college and receive emoluments from the corporate revenues; hence: one of the holders of certain stipendiary positions (called Fellowships) tenable for a limited period on condition of promising some specified branch of work. *O.E.D.*

² The term *Heads of Houses* is commonly used rather than *Masters*, because not every Head of a House is Master: e.g., Queens' College has a President, King's College a Provost.

and at the evening services preceding them. At other times gowns must be worn.

At Jesus College, which is the only College possessing two chapel bells, an ancient custom still survives. Both bells are rung for Sunday services and for those of the greater Saints' Days, for Evensong and on the eves of Saints' Days; at other times only one bell is sounded. The ringing begins fifteen minutes before the service is due to begin and continues for ten minutes. Then, when the Chaplain or the officiating clergyman is in his place, three strokes are sounded on the lower bell.¹

The now world-wide known Service of Carols and the Nine Lessons has been held over the past forty-five years in the afternoon of Christmas Eve in King's College Chapel. Always well attended by local residents, the broadcasting of the service by the B.B.C. has led to a great increase in the number of those wishing to be present. Of recent years a queue, composed of people from many parts of the country, has begun to form as early as five o'clock in the morning, and many disappointed people have to be turned away.

Thomas Case of Cambridge² recalled that when he entered King's College Choir in 1836 an ancient custom was then just beginning to disappear. Whenever a soldier entered the chapel wearing spurs a fee or fine was demanded of him as a safeguard.

College Chapels are the final resting-places of many famous men who, in their lifetime, served as Masters or brought glory to their Colleges by their lives, their deeds or their benefactions. Until almost the middle of the last century the custom was observed at College funerals of pinning to the pall Greek, English and Latin verses, usually written by undergraduates, in praise of the deceased. When Dr Whitaker, Master of St John's College was buried in 1595 'All the University repaired to St John's College which they found hung (chapel, hall and outward court) with mourning, scutcheons,³ and verses'.⁴ The funeral service was held in St Mary's Church, after which the congregation returned to the College, where, after a Latin oration by one of the Fellows, the dead Master was buried in the chapel.

In 1608 died Dr Soame, Master of Peterhouse and Vice-Chancellor. The funeral took place in St Mary's, which

was hung with blacks, & escutcheons & verses, some of the escutcheons

¹ F. C. Brittain: *History of Jesus College*, 1940.

² *Memoirs of a King's College Chorister*, 1899.

³ *Escutcheon*: see under *Burial Customs*, Section I.

⁴ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 542.

of his own arms, & some of the Colleges joyned, &c. There was one before the Pulpit & another before the Orators Pue. The inward side of the back of the Pulpit was also lined with blacks, & verses pinned unto them. The verses were these:

Peter & Abraham were of late at strife,
Which of them two should entertain his life.
The cause was tendered in the highest court,
Where all the Host of Heaven did resort.
Peter possession pleaded, Abraham right
(Oh, that the Saint should harbour such despite!)
At last the destinies that strike all mute
With a Quietus est did end their Suite.
This Judgement passt, & they contend no more,
Abraham enjoys what Peter had before.
In Peter's house he sojourn'd as a guest,
In Abraham's bosome now his soule shall rest.
Weep not Peter, thy loss exceeds complaint,
And boast not Abraham, tho' thou'st got a saint.

The College Court, Hall & Parlour were likewise hung with escutcheons and verses. . . .¹

When Dr John Chevallier, Master of St John's College, was buried in 1789 the custom of the funeral verses was again observed. Gunning² described the procession of which he was a witness:

The corpse was carried in the usual manner round the court, and when it entered the ante-chapel . . . the crowd was tremendous. To the pall were pinned (according to the custom of those days) various compositions in English, Greek and Latin, furnished by the members of the Society,³ expressive of their deep regret.

William Wordsworth was an undergraduate at St John's College when Dr Chevallier died, and in his 'autobiographical notes' which he dictated to his nephew Christopher Wordsworth (Bishop of Lincoln),⁴ in 1847, he referred to the funeral:

In the month of October, 1787, I was sent to St John's College, of which my uncle, Dr Cookson, had been a fellow. The master, Dr Chevallier, died very soon after; and according to the cusom of that time, his body, after being placed in the coffin, was removed to the hall of the college, and the pall, spread over the coffin, was stuck over by copies of verses, English or Latin, the composition of students of St John's. My uncle seemed mortified when upon inquiry he learnt that none of these verses were from my pen. . . .

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, V, 342.

² Henry Gunning: *Reminiscences of Cambridge*, 1854.

³ The Head, Fellows and Officers (Dean, Tutor, Bursar, etc.) of a College are referred to as the *Society*.

⁴ Christopher Wordsworth: *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*, 1851, p. 13.

Dr Richard Porson, M.A., Regius Professor of Greek, died in London in 1808. His body was brought to Trinity College, where it lay in state in the Hall for two hours before being carried round the Great Court to the Chapel. 'Greek and English verses were, according to ancient custom, placed upon the pall.'¹ The custom seems to have been observed for the last time² at the burial in St John's College Chapel of Dr James Wood, who had been Master from 1815 until his death in 1839.

The *Diary of Samuel Newton*³ gives a meticulous description of the burial in 1667, in the Chapel of Pembroke College, of Matthew Wren, Bishop of Ely. The body was brought from London to Cambridge on May 9th and was placed in the Schools,⁴ where the hearse, covered with a pall 'edged with white sarsenet⁵ hung round with Escocheons', with the coat of the King or Herald at Arms spread over it, was watched over by four poor scholars in mourning gowns.

Two days later the Bishop was carried by '6 ordinary persons in course gownes' to Pembroke College, three Doctors of Divinity walking on each side of the hearse and holding the black velvet pall. In the funeral procession walked twenty-eight poor scholars, the Bishop's secretary, officers and servants, and his sons and relations, 'All covered over with mourning, noe hatts or capps on, onely black cloath carelessly lyeing flatt on their heades and but little of their faces sene'. Finally came the Vice-Chancellor, the Doctors of Divinity, Law and Physic, the Bachelors of Divinity and the Masters of Arts.

All ye said Dors &c. had each of them boxes of banquet⁶
to ye number of 500 & to ye value of about 5s. a box.

These boxes probably contained the funerary repast of sweetmeats,⁶ fruit and other delicacies, though the cost is surprisingly high. The account of the funeral of Dr Whitaker, referred to above, also mentions the feast which concluded the burial ceremonies:

Then a banquet of sweetmeats, soured with so sad an occasion (at the sole charge of the college) was rather seen than tasted by the guests formerly surfeited with sorrow.

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, IV, 490.

² A. F. Torry: *Founders and Benefactors of St John's College*, 1888, p. 59.

³ Ed. J. E. Foster, 1890, pp. 19-20.

⁴ The Schools building, between King's Parade and Trinity Lane, was begun in the mid-fourteenth century. Part of it is now the University Registry.

⁵ *Sarsenet*, *sarcenet*: a very fine and soft silk material now used chiefly for linings; a dress of this. *O.E.D.*

⁶ *Banquet*: now a sumptuous feast, but formerly . . . a course of sweetmeats, fruit and wine; a dessert. *O.E.D.*

Similarly, at the funeral of Dr Soame in 1608, when the procession had returned from St Mary's and the Oration had been delivered in the Hall of Peterhouse, the Vice-Chancellor, Doctors, Officers 'and some other grave men went into the Parlour for a Banquet. The Regents¹ & some others did stay in the Hall, where they had cakes and wine.'

The original Chapel of Emmanuel College,² replaced in the seventeenth century, was orientated north and south. This early break with the established custom of church building was at the express wish of the Puritan founder of the College, Sir Walter Mildmay, in protest against Catholic 'superstition'.

The early University having, in its beginning, no Colleges, found accommodation in houses in the centre of Cambridge. It was, therefore, the Church of St Mary the Great on the Market Place which provided a place for worship, for the preaching of sermons on great occasions and for the training of students in the art of preaching. The church was used, too, for the transaction of University business, for the storage of charters and doctors and for teaching and examining. Not until after the Senate House was built between 1722 and 1730 did the church cease entirely to serve as a *locale* for the Disputations by which degrees were obtained and for the conferring of degrees. From earliest times, therefore, St Mary's has been the University Church.

On Sunday afternoons is preached the *University Sermon* at a service, consisting of a hymn, the Bidding Prayer³ and the Sermon, which may also be attended by the ordinary public, who occupy the greater part of the aisle.

Several alterations were made in the church after 1610 for the better accommodation of those attending the Sermon. A Doctor's Gallery, for example, was built across the chancel from north to south, with the seats facing westwards; this was removed, however, in 1617. Then, in the eighteenth century, because so many of the congregation had to stand, new galleries were erected in the aisle and the pulpit⁴ was removed to the pit, or floor of the nave; this pit was reserved for Masters of Arts. In 1754 a gallery was again built across the chancel, with the seats in it facing to the west, for the accom-

¹ The Regents constitute the acting body of University teachers.

² Founded in 1584 on the site of the former Dominican Friary.

³ *Bidding Prayer*: the orig. sense was 'praying of prayers', i.e. *praying*. In the sixteenth century, when *bid* in the sense of 'pray' was becoming obsolete, the *Bidding of prayers* became 'the direction or injoining of prayers'. *O.E.D.* A special form of Bidding Prayer is used at the University Sermons.

⁴ Plate 42.

modation of the Vice-Chancellor, Doctors, Professors and Heads of Houses. The gallery was known as the Throne, but to undergraduates as *Golgotha—the Place of Skulls*.¹

Before the Sermon the University dignitaries meet the Vice-Chancellor and the Preacher in the Senate House and then walk in procession to the church, headed by the Esquire Bedells² and the Proctors. The University also attends officially at services in St Mary's on the afternoon of Ascension Day and on Ash Wednesday, when the Litany is recited.

On the first Sunday in November is held the annual Commemoration of Benefactors. Originally these Commemorations were those of persons on whose behalf special endowments were provided. In 1276, for example, the University held certain properties of which the rents were used for the maintenance of chaplains to pray for the soul of Roger de Heydon, founder of the trust. The Reformation, however, abolished such practices and substituted a more general form of commemoration. The list of Benefactors has been revised from time to time.

The Vice-Chancellor, even though today he is more often a layman than a cleric, conducts the service at which the sermon is preached by the Lady Margaret Preacher, whose office dates from 1604, when an attempt was made to provide the people of England with more and better sermons. It is the Preacher who reads aloud the long list of names of the founders and principal benefactors of the University. Similar commemorations of College founders and benefactors are held annually in College Chapels.

Other sermons preached in the University Church are the Ramsden Sermon and, occasionally, the Hulsean Lecture. The first of these was founded in 1848 by the will of Mrs Charlotte Ramsden of Bath, who made a similar bequest to Oxford. The Sermon was originally ordered to be preached on Whitsunday³ and the subject must be Church Extension over the Colonies and Dependencies of the British Empire. The Hulsean Lecture was appointed by will of John Hulse, who died in 1790 and who provided for twenty sermons a year in St Mary's, each of them to be designed to show the evidence of revealed religion and to demonstrate the truth and excellence of

¹ Tradition says that this name was given to it because so many bald heads of doctors and professors were visible to undergraduates. In the eighteenth century, however, wigs would have been worn, so the name *Skulls* prob. means no more than *Heads* (of Houses).

² See under Calendar Customs: *Fairs*. Plate 23.

³ Not always now on this date. In 1967 the sermon was preached on 22 Jan. The allocation of days to the various preachers is made by the Vice-Chancellor.

Christianity. The lecturer is still elected annually, but he now preaches only once, and not necessarily in St Mary's; he also lectures in a lecture room.

A curious custom is referred to in the *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam*:¹ that of *Scraping* or shuffling of the feet which 'is practised at St Mary's and is no tacit mark of disapprobation of the preacher or of his doctrine or of the length of his discourse'. The writers further make reference to a passage in one of Bishop Latimer's sermons preached before Edward VI:

. . . 'They heard him, saith he (Chrysostom) in silence, not interrupting the order of his preaching'. He means they heard him quietly, without any shoveling Feate.

Among ceremonies of a more secular than religious nature once held in St Mary's was the annual *Magna Congregatio* or *Black Assembly*, as it was more usually called, from the black gown worn by the Vice-Chancellor on the occasion. In accordance with a Charter issued in 1286 the Mayor of Cambridge, with two Aldermen and two residents from each parish, attended in the chancel of the church at ten o'clock in the morning of the Friday before the Feast of SS Simon and Jude (October 28th). The Senior Proctor administered a series of oaths, the Aldermen swearing that they would assist the Mayor and Bailiffs to seek out evildoers, vagabonds and thieves throughout the town. Then the parish representatives swore a similar oath with, in addition, a declaration of their allegiance to the Crown. In 1817, after it had been discontinued for several years, the Black Assembly was revived, the Vice-Chancellor requesting the Mayor 'to enter into the engagements required by our Charters and the Ancient Customs of the University'² because of the alarming increase in the number of beggars and vagrants in the town.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the *Paving Leet*³ was held, also in the chancel of St Mary's and at the same time as the

¹ *The Gradus ad Cantabrigiam or The New University Guide to the Academical Customs and Coluquial or Cant Terms Peculiar to the University of Cambridge* by A. Brace of Cantabs. First published in 1823, the second edition (1828) contains an additional *Tail Piece or The Reading and Varmint Method of Proceeding to the Degree of A.B.*

² C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, IV, 517.

³ By an Act of Parliament in 1544 (Stat. 35 Hen. VIII, c. 15) every Cambridge householder was required to be responsible for the state of the street opposite his own house, in some streets to pave them, in others to gravel them. At the biennial Paving Leet or Court, the Vice-Chancellor and the Mayor, with others, nominated a number of citizens to inspect the streets to see that the Act was being complied with. Defaulting householders were reported to the Leet and could be fined. The persons chosen as street inspectors had to swear on oath at the Leet that they would carry out their duties faithfully.

Black Assembly. Alderman Newton describes in his *Diary*, on 23 October 1668, how he attended the combined Assembly and Paving Leet, going first to the Mayor's house, where, with three Aldermen, three Common Councillors, the Bailiffs and the Town Clerk, he partook of 'sliced cakes and strong beere and sugar and nutmegg' before the school bell¹ summoned them to St Mary's. Here the Vice-Chancellor, after the oaths had been taken, gave a homily on the sacred character of the promises which had been made. The Paving Leet was discontinued from 1789 and soon afterwards the Black Assembly also ceased until its revival, much resented by the townspeople, in 1817. It was finally abolished in 1856.

There are now twelve² bells in the University Church, together with a small sanctus bell called the Saints' Bell, which was cast in Benet Street not far from the church. The School Bell, which once announced disputations in the Schools, was regularly rung at St Mary's, the University paying an annual fee to the churchwardens for this service. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when every Master of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity was required to preach to those in Holy Orders and to those about to be examined, it was the custom for the 'little bell' to be rung for the preaching Bachelor and the 'great bell' for the Doctor.³

A great peal is rung on the occasions of the conferring of Honorary Degrees, and, of course, on all great national occasions of rejoicing. The second, or Curfew Bell, is rung before the University Sermon and even before Mere's Sermon,⁴ although this is preached in St Benet's Church. The ringing of the curfew, for which the town council once paid a fee to St Mary's, from nine o'clock each night for a quarter of an hour, ending with strokes equal in number to the date, ceased only during the Second World War. Until 1929 a bell was rung at St Mary's from 5.45 to six o'clock each morning; this was known as the *Apprentices' Bell* and later as the *Bedmakers' Bell*,⁵ since it was intended

¹ i.e. the bell of St Mary's which was always rung before any Congregation of the University.

² There were four when the church was completely rebuilt 1478-1591. In 1772 two more were added to the eight then existing. The last two were bought in 1769.

³ Cole's MSS., XLIV, 353 (Brit. Mus.). Extract from Matthew Stokys, Esquire Bedell's Book., in Univ. Registry.

⁴ Founded in 1559 by the executors of John Mere, Fellow of King's College. By the original deed the sermon was to be preached yearly in St Benet's Church on the Wednesday in Easter Week, and payments were to be made to the Vice-Chancellor, proctors, bell-ringer, etc. The subjects of the sermons were also laid down and included Duty to the Poor, Obedience to Tutors, etc.

⁵ See below under *College Servants*.

that these workers should rise from their beds on hearing it. Until early in the last century it was the custom for a bell to be tolled for an hour before the burial of any graduate who had died in Cambridge.

The bells are still rung by the Ancient Society of Cambridge Youths, founded in 1724, although an earlier society composed mainly of younger members of the University existed in the reign of Elizabeth I. A number of both senior and junior members of the University have been members of the Cambridge Youths.

College Names and Nicknames

Pious dedication (e.g. Christ's,¹ Jesus, Emmanuel), or the names of Founders (e.g. Sidney Sussex, Pembroke, Selwyn) have given the majority of Colleges their names. These, in everyday use, are in many cases abbreviations of the full, more resounding and historically accurate titles given in the various Corporate Designations. Thus, Pembroke College was founded by Mary de St Paul, widow of Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, as 'the Hall or House of Valence Mary'. The present Statutes, approved by the King in Council in 1926, direct that 'this House shall be called the College or Hall of Valence-Mary or Pembroke College'. The Corporate Designation of King's College is 'The Provost and Scholars of the King's College of Our Lady and St Nicholas in Cambridge'; that of Jesus College is 'The Master or Keeper and Fellows and Scholars of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St John the Evangelist and the Glorious Virgin Saint Radegund² commonly called Jesus College'; that of Queens'³ College: 'The President and Fellows of the Queen's³ College of St Margaret and St Bernard, commonly called Queens' College'.

Peterhouse, founded in 1286, is named from the near-by church of St Peter-without-the Trumpington Gate, now St Mary the Less (usually referred to as Little St Mary's), which church was used by the College before its own Chapel was built. St John's College, founded in 1511 by Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, perpetuates the name of the Hospital of St John, founded c. 1135, to which it succeeded. Corpus Christi College (1352) owes its foundation

¹ The word College is usually omitted when speaking or in informal writing.

² Jesus College succeeded to the Benedictine Nunnery of St Radegund.

³ The plural apostrophe, followed by the singular, arise from the fact that Queens' College was first founded in 1448 by Queen Margaret of Anjou, consort of Henry VI, and re-founded in 1465 by Elizabeth Woodville, consort of Edward IV, under the title of the Queen's College of St Margaret and St Bernard.

to the Gilds of Corpus Christi and the Blessed Virgin Mary, both titles included in the present Corporate Designation.

All but seven¹ of the Colleges have, some since the eighteenth century or earlier, acquired nicknames, several of which are in current use. In many cases the names were customarily bestowed on the members of rather than to the College itself. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century members of Christ's were known as *Christians*. In the eighteenth century members of Clare were referred to as *Clarians* and in the nineteenth as *Greyhounds*. Members of Jesus College were known in the early nineteenth century as *Jesuits* and those of Magdalene as *Simeonites*.² Trinity and Sidney Sussex members were called, respectively, *Bulldogs* and *Owls* throughout the last century.

The abbreviation of *Emma* for Emmanuel and of *Pemma* for Pembroke came into use *c.* 1918. From *c.* 1860 until *c.* 1885 Sidney Sussex was known as *The Dusthole*; previously, as now, it was simply known as *Sidney*. Since 1870 St Catharine's has been commonly known as *Cats* and its members as *Catsmen*. From *c.* 1870 until early in this century Peterhouse was referred to as *Pothouse*.

Members of St John's College are today known as *Johnians*; in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth they were referred to as *Hogs* and from *c.* 1800 as *Pigs*, with or without the prefix *Johnian*. The name seems to have been acquired by reason of the ill manners and brutish appearance attributed to Johnians of the past.

The abbreviation of *Fitzbilly* for Fitzwilliam College is now probably used more by townspeople than by members of the College, and is heard, too, applied by them to the Fitzwilliam Museum. The cake shop, *Fitzbillies*, established in the last century in Trumpington Street, perpetuates the nickname.

College Servants

Bedmakers

These women, known generally since *c.* 1870 as *Bedders*, clean, wash up and make beds for the undergraduates and Fellows who live

¹ Corpus Christi, Downing, Queens', Churchill and the three women's colleges: Newnham, Girton and New Hall.

² Followers of the Rev. Charles Simeon (1759–1836), Fellow of King's College and Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge. His appointment to Holy Trinity was at first fiercely opposed on account of his strong Evangelistic views; his sermons were often interrupted and he was, on occasions, even assaulted by undergraduates. He overcame the opposition, however, and won a large following in both the University and the Town. The nickname *Simeonites* was also given to any University men who had strong religious convictions or were studiously inclined.

in the Colleges. Their work, until the end of the last century, included, in addition, waiting at table in the College Halls. The majority of bedders come from Cambridge, but in the past women came in daily from surrounding villages, often adding to their wages by taking home the laundry of the men under their care. One woman at least is known to have walked daily from Great Eversden and back, a distance of fourteen miles in all. Now under the supervision of professional women trained in Institutional Management, the bedders were formerly under the official direction of the College Porters, a system which must at times have led to trouble on both sides.

Bedmakers were employed from the eighteenth century onwards—men as well as women at first—to perform the duties which had hitherto been undertaken by poor scholars known as *Sizars*.¹ The name bedmaker was, however, certainly in use in the seventeenth century, for in Alderman Newton's *Diary*, under the date 5 January 1664/5, he describes how a Fellow of Trinity College had fallen down the stairs in the College in the night and was found 'about 5 in the morning by the bedmakers . . . cold and stiff'.

The bedmakers of today are very different from their predecessors.² Many of them are young, attractive and well-dressed, whereas, until early in this century, it was customary to appoint more elderly and, by contemporary accounts, far from good-looking women, presumably in the interests of the undergraduates' morals. Even until shortly before the Second World War only married women could be bedders. A woman still working in one of the Colleges recalled in 1966 that when she applied for work in 1936, two months before she was going to be married, she was told that she could not be engaged by the College until after the wedding ceremony had been performed. A great break with tradition was recently made by Trinity College, who engaged two girls in their late teens as bedmakers; their employment was, however, short-lived. The majority of the women are still married; bedmaking is a useful part-time occupation which allows family duties to be fulfilled.

The traditional dress of the nineteenth-century bedder was a black dress, cape or shawl and bugle-trimmed³ bonnet; today brightly coloured nylon or flowered overalls are uniform. The bedder of today is well paid in comparison with her predecessors, who, to eke out their

¹ See below under *Academical Dress*.

² Plate 51.

³ *Bugle*: a tube-shaped glass bead, usually black, used to ornament wearing apparel. *O.E.D.*

meagre earnings, not infrequently took home in bulging carpet bags remains of food, wine or any other perquisites left by undergraduates and Fellows after meals in their rooms. It was this habit which gained for the bedders such a bad name. William Everett,¹ an American who came up to Trinity in 1859, gave in a course of lectures² on his impressions of Cambridge a vivid picture of the bedmakers he knew:

A person once appointed to this seriously lucrative and responsible place never gives it up, although utterly superannuated, toothless and tottering. Accordingly her one assistant will grow into two and the two will have three or four extra miscellaneous ones generally floating round, to do everything that their chiefs are too lazy to do themselves . . . they order from the butteries every day twice as much bread and butter as a man wants and at the end of the day all that's left goes to them, by immemorial custom, as perquisites. And any meats left from a dinner, breakfast, &c., unless specially mentioned by you, go to them as perquisites . . . They form an immense body . . . grown old in the college and handing down their power to their nieces and daughters. . . . Their honesty is quite above suspicion—in some cases.

The bedders of today are not recognisable in this description. They are devoted to the undergraduates in their care and take a keen interest in their well-being. There are known instances of women turning up for work even though their husbands had died during the preceding night. One such woman, on being told by the Superintendent that she should not have come replied: 'I had to; the exams are on and I had to be here to see after my gentlemen.' There is a story told in one College that when, some years ago, for some reason now forgotten, the bedmakers had to wait in Hall on one occasion, service was much delayed because each woman was anxious to see that 'her gentlemen' had the best of everything.

Bedders work shorter hours now than in the past; no longer do they have to return in the evenings to tidy rooms, wash up tea-cups, glasses, etc., or work on Sundays, while the installation of central heating, gas and electric fires and bathrooms has abolished the heavy tasks of coal- and water-carrying which fell to the lot of their predecessors.

So many Cambridge women work as bedmakers that the local bus company runs special early-morning buses from the outlying suburbs east and south of the City, stopping at an unscheduled stop on Market Hill to allow the women more easily to reach the various Colleges by seven o'clock.

¹ Son of Edward Everett, minister to the Court of St James, 1839-46.

² These were published in 1866 under the title *On the Cam*.

Gyps

These are the College menservants appointed, as were the bed-makers, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Their numbers are dwindling, those that remain attending mainly on resident Fellows. The pantries on the various College staircases, formerly used by the gyps and now by the undergraduates themselves for tea- and coffee-making, etc., are known as *gyp rooms*. 'Gypping', like bedmaking, ran in families, son following father and becoming in time an integral part of the College. In the years following the First World War, however, their duties changed considerably. From acting as valets and 'gentlemen's gentlemen' they came to discharge more general duties—staircase-sweeping, boiler-stoking and waiting in Hall, this last having always been part of their functions in the early days of their appointment.

Together with bedmakers, gyps were much maligned in the past. 'Mercuries for expedition and roguery' they were called in the *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam*, whose authors proceed to the information that

they obtained their appellation from their rapacious habits, they being not over-scrupulous in breaking the 8th commandment. The word GYP very properly characterizes them it being derived from the Greek word, γύψ a Vulture.

William Everett, too, had little good to say of them:

. . . most of them are either too old and worn out, or young, impudent and thievish. . . . The whole set may be defined as leeches.

However true this may have been in the past, the gyps of more modern times 'have been among the best-loved landmarks of undergraduate life'.¹

Head Porters and Others

'Always keep on the right side of your Tutor and your College Porter' is advice given in one of several Guides to Freshmen published early in this century. Almost every College can boast of at least one—usually more—Head Porter who is ranked among the College 'characters'. Dignified on formal occasions in his tall silk hat, the Porter has always been an important and imposing member of the College staff. When chapel attendance was compulsory it was he who, in some Colleges, had to mark off those who dutifully complied with the rule and who had to exact the fines from absentees. Waiting in Hall, too, was sometimes a part of his duties.

Head Porters have largely escaped the harsh criticism levelled in

¹ B. J. White: *Cambridge Life*, 1960, p. 81.

the past at the gyps and bedmakers, although William Everett complained of their avarice.

College *Boot-blacks*¹ have now almost disappeared, though they were once regularly employed. Early in the morning they went the round of the College collecting boots, shoes and riding boots and taking them down to some cubby-hole near the kitchens and there cleaned and polished them before they returned them to their owners. In the latter part of the day they worked at various odd jobs—cleaning, fetching and carrying, waiting at table and so on. William Everett complained that ‘in their blacking they cut your boots to pieces with a knife’, but he seems to have found little good to say about College servants.

Payments to *Barbers* occur in the Bursars’ accounts of several Colleges up to the eighteenth century and there are references in College documents to special rooms assigned to them: ‘ye Barber’s Shop’ at Trinity College; ‘The Barber’s Chamber’ at Christ’s College. At King’s College has recently been discovered the original Statute of 1543 setting up the office of College Porter. In addition to his duties of opening and closing the gates at the proper times, he was required to take charge of the torches and other lights of the chapel whenever they were needed, to wait at table and to ‘perform the duties of barber’, shaving the Provost, Fellows, Scholars and choristers.

Professor Pryme, who entered Trinity College in 1799, recalled that ‘wigs were still worn by the Dons and Heads with two or three exceptions’ and relates:²

In Mr Daniel Sykes’ time, which was twenty years before mine, the Senior Fellows of Trinity wore wigs and he was, as he told me long afterwards, concerned in a practical joke concerning them. There was a barber’s shop just within the gate of Trinity near Bishop’s Hostel. Here the Fellows were powdered and their wigs dressed. It existed even in my time. Sykes and some others bribed the barber one Saturday night, when he had the Sunday wigs to dress, and getting out upon the library parapet, placed them on the four statues which face the hall. . . .

Dress

a. Academical

The gown which every undergraduate is required to wear on certain occasions³ and which is, within a wide range of design and

¹ Men and women were employed in this capacity. See Plate 43.

² *Autobiographical Recollections*, 1870.

³ At University Lectures and Examinations, in the University Library and at ceremonies in the Senate House. Since 1965 a gown need not be worn in the streets after dark.

colour, the academical attire of all senior members of the University from Doctors to Bachelors derives from the ordinary topcoat or cloak of the medieval scholar. From the same scholar's head cover, attached to the cloak, has evolved the present graduate's hood, now a separate item of dress.

From the early days of the University students were constantly reproved for wearing attire unsuited to their clerical status. In 1342, for example, a constitution issued by Archbishop Stratford provided punishment for all who insisted on wearing cloaks with furred edges, rings on their fingers, coloured shoes and costly gilded and enamelled girdles.¹ Again, in 1557, the Convocation of Canterbury advised that 'all . . . dwelling in the Universities for the sake of learning, should be clothed in clerical and sacerdotal habits, so that they might be distinguished from laymen . . .'²

Individual Colleges, too, strove to ensure uniformity and economy in dress. At King's College, where the Bursars provided cloth to be made into clothing—a long gown reaching almost to the ground being indispensable—Scholars and Fellows were forbidden to pawn or sell the clothes until they had worn them for two years and they were strictly forbidden to adopt the dress of fashionable laymen.³

That a 'gown must be worn not carried' is still a regulation as often honoured in the breach as in the observance. The custom of carrying gowns in the street, on the way to lectures, in College Courts and elsewhere began in 1863,⁴ when a weak Proctor allowed it to creep in. The wearing of a cap and gown on Sundays, even on country walks, is no longer compulsory.

The condition of an undergraduate's gown matters little; in fact, the tattered gown is part of University tradition. When the New Theatre (pulled down in 1960) was built in Cambridge in 1895 plaster mouldings⁵ over the entrance door to the Stalls Bar showed three undergraduate gowns representing, in their increasing degrees the raggedness, the first-, second- and third-year man.

The undergraduate often buys his gown second-hand from the College porter or some other source and is not infrequently seen wearing one which is that of another College than his own. It was in the first half of the nineteenth century that the present custom arose of having for each College its own distinctive gown, although Jesus College had, from the seventeenth century, until early in the present

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 94. ² *op. cit.*, II, 141.

³ A. Austen Leigh: *King's College*, 1899, p. 11.

⁴ T. G. Bonney: *Memories of a Long Life*, 1921.

⁵ Now in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

one, a special gown worn by the Rustat Scholars.¹ Until the 1830s most students wore a short sleeveless black gown called a *curtain*. Corpus Christi College initiated the change in custom when, in 1828, it was agreed that undergraduates of that College should wear a gown similar to that worn by a Bachelor of Arts, but with velvet facings. Clare College followed suit in 1836, when its students were allowed to wear black gowns with three velvet stripes on the sleeves, and soon other Colleges adopted distinctive gowns.²

The gowns of Trinity College are of dark blue with black facings on the forepart of the sleeves; those of Peterhouse are plain black, while Caius College undergraduates wear gowns of a slightly paler blue than those of Trinity, with black velvet yokes and velvet on the foreparts of the sleeves. The Johnian's gown is black with four narrow velvet stripes placed chevron-wise on the sleeves. These stripes were referred to facetiously in the last century as *crackling*, by analogy with the nickname of *Hogs* bestowed on members of the College. Westminster Scholars at Trinity College wore black gowns at one time, with a violet button and loop on the forearm sleeve. The gowns of the remaining Colleges are black with slight modifications in details of sleeves and trimming and so are not easily, at first glance, distinguishable one from another.

The custom of showing by the gown the rank or social standing of its wearer is no longer observed. Until the latter part of the last century the Nobleman had two gowns. One, worn in public processions and on festival days, was purple and trimmed with gold lace; with it was worn a square black velvet cap with a very long gold tassel. The other, worn every day, was of black silk with full sleeves. With this a tall hat was worn.

Immediately below the Nobleman in rank was the Fellow Commoner,³ usually a young man of wealth or the younger son of nobility, who had the privilege of dining at the High Table. He usually wore a black gown with a square collar, sleeves decorated with gold lace and a square black velvet cap with a gold tassel. Fellow Commoners of Trinity College, however, had purple gowns trimmed with silver lace and a silver tassel on the cap; those of Magdalene College, Queens' College and Corpus Christi College had Bachelors' silk

¹ Tobias Rustat, Yeoman of the Robes to Charles II, founded a scholarship at Jesus College for sons of clergy and directed that scholars should wear a special gown. This was of plain black material.

² Plate 44.

³ There are still a few Fellow Commoners—men of distinction on whom the title, with its attendant privileges of dining at the High Table in Hall, etc., has been conferred in honour of their achievements or their services to their College.

gowns which, at Magdalene were gathered and looped up at the sleeves and at Corpus Christi¹ had velvet facings. Fellow Commoners who were sons of Noblemen, Baronets or eldest sons of Baronets were known as Hat Fellow Commoners because they wore the Nobleman's tall hat with their gowns.

The privileges enjoyed by Fellow Commoners were the cause of much envy and various opprobrious nicknames were bestowed on them in the last century. 'Empty Bottles', 'Useless Members', 'Licensed Sons of Ignorance' are among those recorded in the *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam*, although the authors add a footnote to the effect that Fellow Commoners by no means deserved such names, since many of them obtained a distinguished place in the Tripos Examinations.

The third distinctive gown was worn by the undergraduate lowest in the social hierarchy, the poor student or Sizar² who, in return for free Commons³ and other allowances, had to earn these privileges by waiting in Hall on the Fellows and sometimes on the Scholars and, in the seventeenth century, by performing such menial tasks as fetching water, sweeping rooms and making beds. He dined off the remains of the food from the Fellows' tables, thus obtaining his *Sizings* or extra delicacies such as puddings without paying for them. In St John's College the sizars from 1785 no longer had to wait at table, although the custom continued at Trinity until 1840. Sizars' gowns differed only slightly from those worn by the *Pensioners*—the main body of undergraduates who paid the normal fees for their tuition and board—although the last-named often had velvet facings on their gowns while the sizars had not.

Doctors are distinguished by the scarlet gowns of varying design which are worn on special occasions, black gowns being reserved for ordinary use. In earlier times the Doctors of Law, Divinity and Physic had three gowns each, the additional one being represented today by the sleeveless cope or cloak, lined with miniver⁴ and with a

¹ This College possesses a gown, similar in design to that of a Master of Arts, but with gold bands laid chevron-wise on the sleeves. It is worn by the Schoolmaster Fellow Commoner of each year. These Fellowships are awarded annually in many Colleges to masters from public and grammar schools for the purposes of a year's research course.

² Financial grants, called *Sizarships*, are now made by some colleges to undergraduates towards the cost of their University education. Under the system of State grants the Sizarships are applied for less often than they formerly were.

³ *Commons*: a fixed amount of food, esp. bread, butter and milk, supplied by the College Buttery.

⁴ *Miniver*: a kind of fur used as a lining and trimming in ceremonial costume. In 1688 explained as 'plain white fur' and used recently in this sense. *O.E.D.*

tippet or hood of the same material, which is worn by the Vice-Chancellor and by those who present candidates for Doctors' degrees.

On *Scarlet Days*, that is on the greater festivals of the Church, doctors wear their scarlet gowns. The earliest reference to this custom is in 1578, when the penalty for non-compliance with the regulation was a fine of 10s. The velvet bonnet worn by all doctors, except Doctors of Divinity, who wear a square velvet cap, is the ordinary head-gear that was worn by the gentleman of the sixteenth century.

The hoods now worn by Masters of Arts and Music are of black corded silk lined with white and dark cherry respectively. Bachelors' hoods are black, trimmed with white fur, although it might perhaps be more in keeping with tradition were the trimming to be of lambs-wool or lambskin. When efforts were being made by the University authorities to repress extravagance in both ordinary and academical dress, it was forbidden in 1414 to use on the hood or other scholastic habit any trimming except lamb's wool or budge¹ fur.

The undergraduate of today is no longer required to wear the academical cap or *square* as it was commonly called in Cambridge. This is the cap, known generally elsewhere as a *mortar board*², consisting of a stiffened headpiece surrounded by a 'square' or 'board', the whole being covered with black cloth and ornamented with a tassel on the centre of the 'board'. The Second World War led to a scarcity of these squares and although an effort was made after 1945 to bring them back into compulsory use, the attempt did not succeed. Undergraduates, prior to the eighteenth century, wore the medieval layman's round cap or bonnet, of velvet for pensioners and of silk for sizars; in 1769 they obtained permission to adopt the square cap hitherto reserved for scholars and graduates and which was the medieval clerical headwear. From this evolved the later stiffened square.

The linen bands with rounded ends which are worn round the neck with the ends hanging about 4 inches down on the wearer's chest, which distinguish the Proctors' gowns and are worn by graduates when they receive their degrees, were once an obligatory item of undergraduate academical dress. They were, it seems, worn unwillingly. An essay in the *Cambridge Review* of March 1882 quotes

¹ *Budge*: a kind of fur, consisting of lamb's skin with the wool dressed outwards. *O.E.D.*

² It is often assumed that the academic mortar board derived from the board used by bricklayers for holding mortar, to which the *O.E.D.* gives the earliest reference as 1876. The term *mortar board* as a popular name for the academical cap predates this by twenty-two years, the earliest reference given by the *O.E.D.* being 1854.

the following anecdote from the *Life of the Rev. Samuel Settle*¹ by the Rev. Thomas Hervey. A contemporary of Settle, Richard Horsman Solly of Magdalene, had been remonstrated with for not wearing bands, so:

The next day he attached to his cravat two handkerchiefs, which came down to his waist, and thus attired went to hall. Mr Farish (the Tutor) as he passed up the hall, glanced round at the men and saw, as he thought, Solly with a white waist-coat but no bands; so he said 'Mr Solly you seem to have no bands'. Solly with a composure which seems to have been natural to him, replied, 'Yes, Sir, I have', at the same time taking the ends of the handkerchiefs with the tips of his fingers and holding them up. . . .

Academical mourning worn on the occasion of the death of a Chancellor or a Vice-Chancellor during his term in office was once more elaborate than now. Black ribbons were worn on the squares, attached from corner to corner, the tassle having been removed, and joined in the centre with a rosette. Long black bands, called *Weepers*, were worn round the neck and black cuffs round the wrists. Today black gowns without hoods are the attire for senior members when attending funerals or memorial services. On the death of a Vice-Chancellor in office or a Chancellor the University Maces are swathed in black. Plate 67 shows a University procession in June 1967, shortly after the death of Chancellor Lord Tedder; the maces remained so swathed until after the Memorial Service held in St Mary the Great on 13th July. Hitherto, on such occasions, they were not uncovered until a new Chancellor had been elected.

*b. Ordinary*²

In their non-academical dress University men of each succeeding generation have usually reflected the current fashions of their day, the extent and quality of their wardrobe naturally depending on their financial resources.

It is in the use or non-use of certain accessories of dress and in the manner in which certain garments are worn that customs have so often changed. Overcoats, for example, were for some time after the 1920s despised by undergraduates even in the wintriest of weather. Tweed sports jackets, flannel trousers or, for a time in the early 1930s, corduroy trousers in rich colours of mulberry, green or brown, and a College scarf wrapped twice round the neck were considered ample

¹ Only forty-two copies of this book were printed in 1881 for private circulation. Samuel Settle, b. 1771, entered Magdalene College in 1794.

² Plate 45.

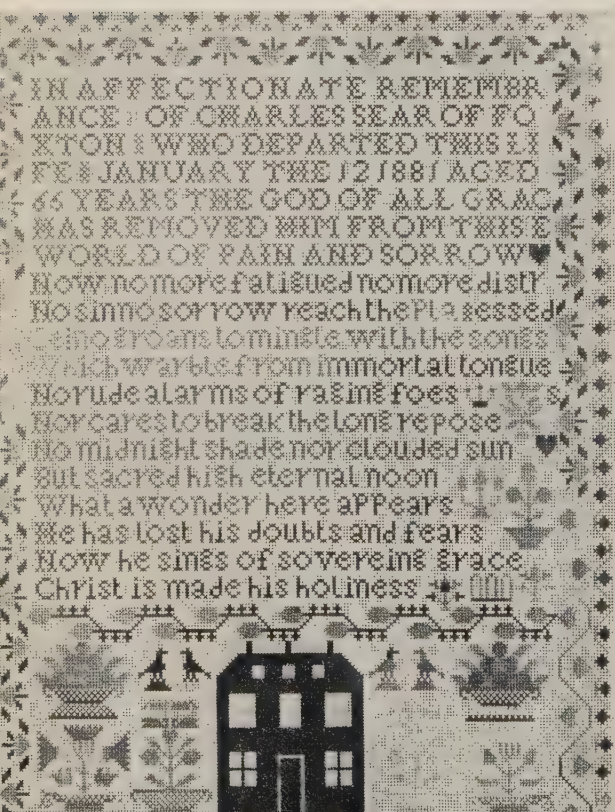


1 Above: Courtship Token. Below: 'Dragon's Blood' in stick form, with wrapper, ready for reducing to powder.

2 Bottisham Village School in 1930, showing figure of Jenyns Charity Schoolboy over door.



3 *In Memoriam* Sampler, 1881.



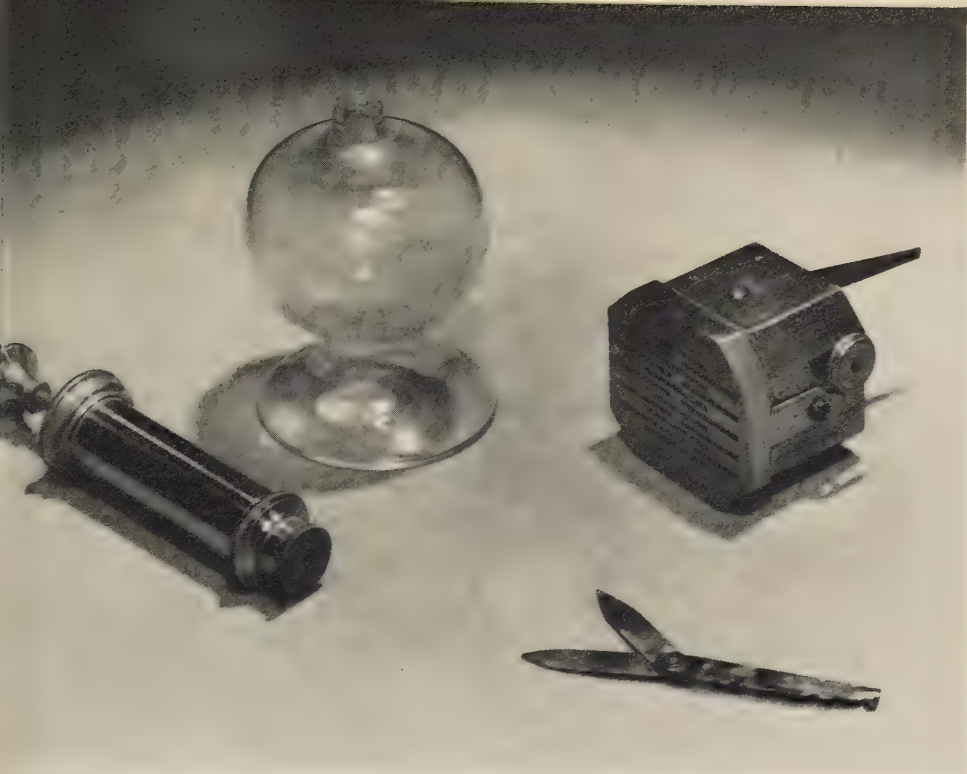


4 White Bryony ('Mandrake') Root.



5 Some Cambridgeshire Plants: their folk-lore and medicinal uses. From drawings by Boyd Tunnard.

6 The Melbourn Elm Tree in 1851.



7 Cupping Glass, Scarifier and Venesection Knife.

8 Holed Stones. *Left*: Hung on door to protect against witchcraft. *Right*: Placed under bed to prevent cramp.





9 Split and Bound Ash Sapling used to reduce hernia.



10 Plough Monday Boys in Swaffham Prior, 1929.

11 Cambridge Morris Men, 1967.





12 Good Friday Skipping in Cambridge, 1938.

13 Stalls on Parkside, Cambridge. Good Friday, 1938.





14 Good Friday Loaf baked in West Wrentham in 1916.

15 Ascension Day Singing on St John's College Tower, 1965.





16 Corn Dollies from Meldreth, Horseheath and (*foreground*) Chippenham.
Twentieth century.

Highly Whiffell

The

May^{or}

and
Adorne

& to y^e rest of my M^{ty} Masters Swellg in

CAMBRIDGE

The Bellman's Apology.

I my living Masters y^e shouds y
e be gratefull, but will always pay
my due respects to you that have bin kind
And pray for them who are of other mind
My ne^{er} appa^{re} — or your Halcyon — y^e
x^{en} if — chaise time I d —
ea^{ch} wish not here — and —
that their anger chance to get
While I have being, I'll not cease to pray
That god will still protect you night & day

On — lamentable Fire at New Market.

It's all my care and all my night toore
To see your Houses safe from sudden Fire:
And from that cruel Destroyer of state
That poor New Market has bel^on of late
— the most horrid conspiracy & Plot
— imagine y^e so base a th^{ing} —

On y^e 5th Day of November
— our devedy Reme^mbrance that they did
Bin to rest up y^e story that pr —
That god hath planted with his own
And many Yeares hath prospered in this
Upon good grounds yet we have cau^{se}
This Vibe will preat in sight of Hell
And now, my Masters, I have spok^en
And for this cause don't care — proue
I value not one rush what Envy sa^{ys}
I hope to live & be firm in this faith.
Upon S^r. Andrew's Day.
Let all be prouise y^e men
— ever can be made — Trade
Nine Kings of this Brave Company w^{ill}
With severall Dukes & Earls of high de^{gree}
seventy & seven honorable lords
And thus he proue y^e very good ore

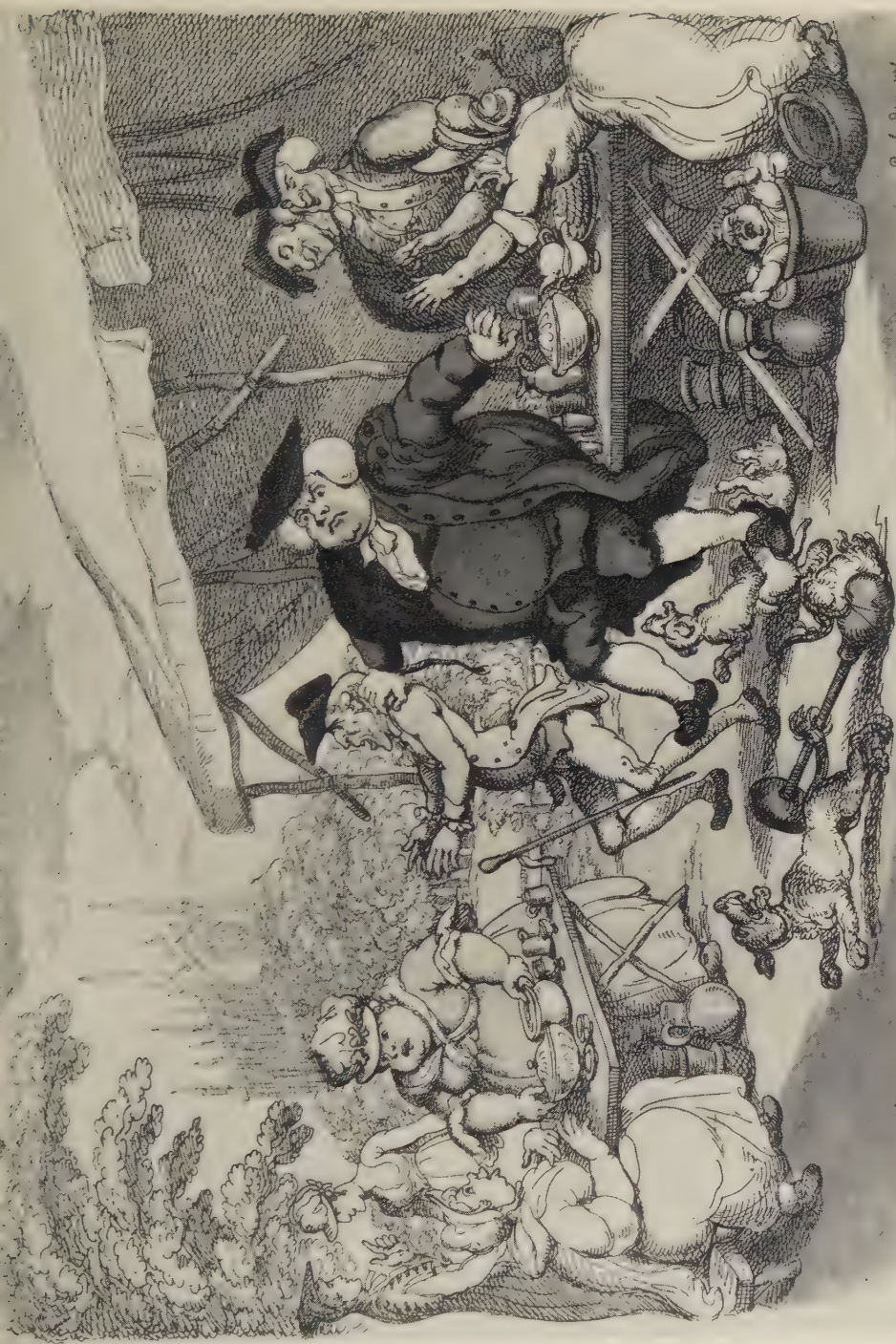




18 Proclamation of the Cambridge Midsummer Fair, 1963.

19 Throwing Halfpennies at the Midsummer Fair Proclamation, 1963.





POT FAIR, CAMBRIDGE.



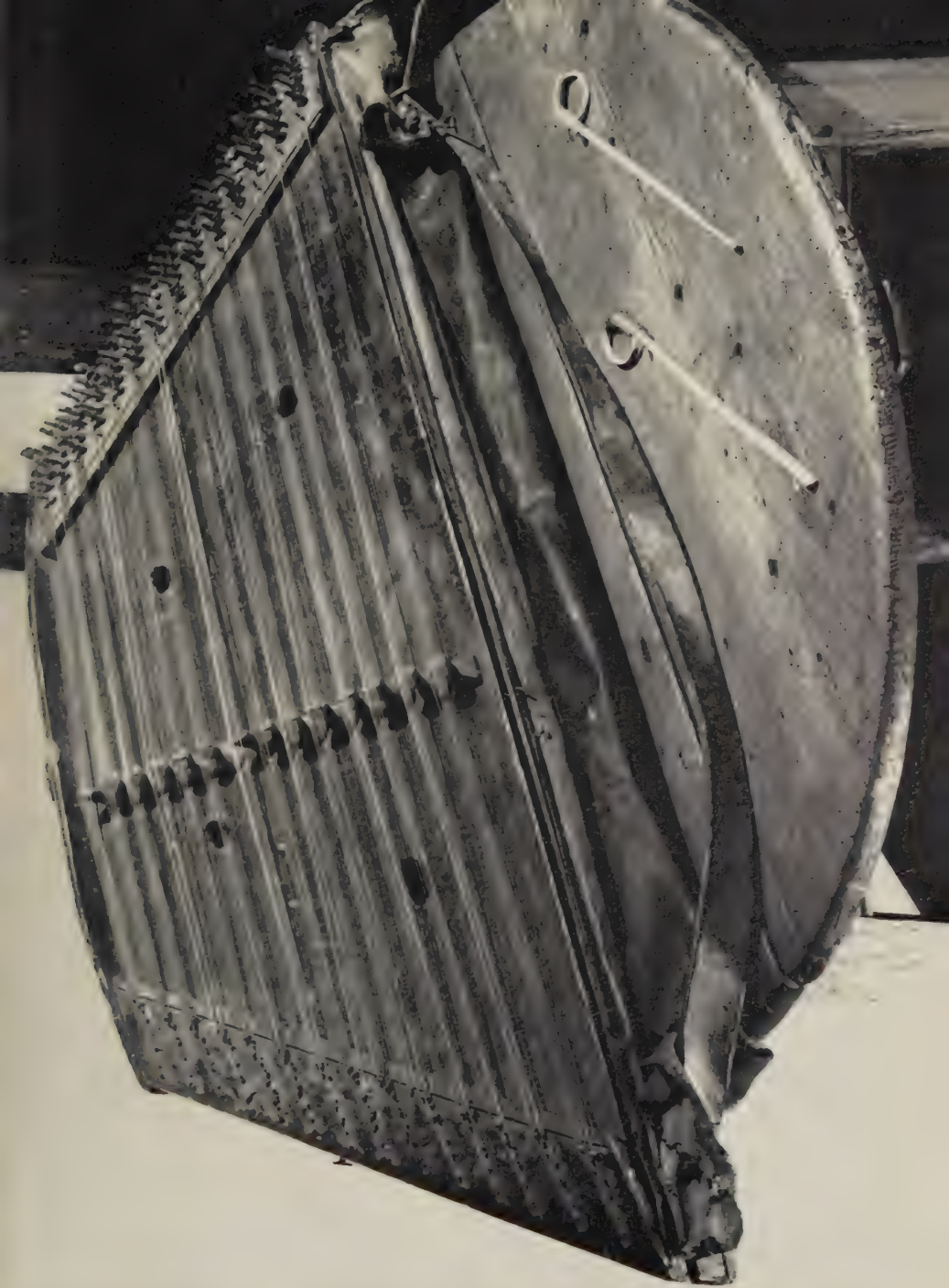
21 China Stall at Midsummer Fair, Cambridge, 1963.



22 Honorary Degree Day, 1910. *Left to right:* The Esquire Bedells with Maces; Theodore Roosevelt the Vice-Chancellor; the University Marshal with the Yeoman Bedell's Mace.



26 Coton Feast, 1963.



27 Nineteenth century Cambridgeshire-made Dulcimer, played at feasts and fairs.



28 The Abbey House, Cambridge in 1930.

- 29 Witch Safeguards found in walls of Cambridgeshire Houses. Bone (*Folk Museum*); Bottle (*Sawston*); Shoe (*former Three Tuns Inn, Cambridge*); Patten (*Caldecote*).





30 Hickathrift's Candlestick - Tilney All Saints (*Norfolk*).



31 Jacob Butler. *From etching by Rev. M. Tyson.*



32 Elizabeth Woodcock of Impington. *From drawing by J. Baldrey.*



33 Victorian Play-Things: Bat, Trap and Ball; Battledore and Shuttlecock; Cup and Ball; Metal Tightrope Walker.



34 Demonstrating the game of Bandy, 1899.

35 The Cambridge Party Boat *Victoria*, c. 1890.





36 A Fen wildfowler in his Gun Punt.



37 Ice Skates: 'Whittlesey Runners' and one of a pair of Roller Skates used by A. E. Tebbitt for road practice in summer.



38 Skating Match on the Nene at Wisbech 1891.



39 George ('Fish') Smart, champion Fen Skater. *From a drawing by C. Whympers.*



40 Roller Skating Carnival at Cambridge, 1912.

SOHAM

Peace Festival,

Friday August 12, 1814.

SPORTS FOR THE DAY,

To Commence at 4 o'clock in the afternoon,

- 1st. A DONKEY RACE, the Winner to have *Five Shillings*. X
- 2nd. A PONEY RACE, for *half a guinea* the Ponies to be under thirteen hands high
- 3rd. A DONKEY RACE, for *Five Shillings* the last to be the Winner. X
- 4th. CLIMBING A MAST for a Hat.
- 5th. LIGHT GIRLS under twenty Years of Age to run for a SHAWL.
- 6th. EIGHT BOYS under Fifteen Years of Age to run for a pair of SHOES.
- 7th. SIX MEN to Jump in Sacks the Winner to receive *Ten Shillings*.
- 8th. A JINGLING MATCH, for a Hat to be decided in Fifteen Minutes.
- 9th. TWELVE Women, to run for a Copper Tea Kettle Value *half a guinea*.
- 10th. The losers of the last Race, to run for a Pound of TEA.
- 11th. A WHEEL BARROW Race by Six Men Blindfold, the winner to receive *Ten shillings*.
- 12th. SIX Men to Grin through a Collar, the Winner to receive *Ten Shillings*.
- 13th. A PIG HUNT (the Pig valued at *Forty Shillings*) with its tail Soaped as usual.

THE WHOLE OF WHICH WILL CONCLUDE WITH A GRAND DISPLAY OF

FIREWORKS.

The Donkey and Poney Races are open for the public in general.

☞ All Persons wishing to engage in any of the above amusements, are requested to signify their intentions on or before the Thursday preceding to the Committee, at the School Room at Six o'Clock in the Evening.

Playford Printer, Mildenhall



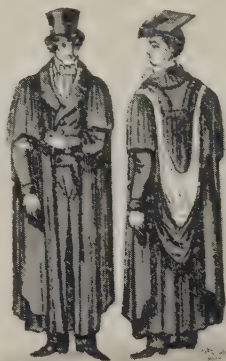
42 Church of St Mary the Great, Cambridge: Interior, looking west. *From engraving by Storer.*



43 An eighteenth century College Shoe-Cleaner.



NOBLEMEN
Dress Gown. Undress Gown.



MASTERS OF ARTS
in Hat. in Hood Band.



BACHELORS OF ARTS.



QUEENS' COLLEGE & PETERHOUSE
Fellow Comm. Pensioner



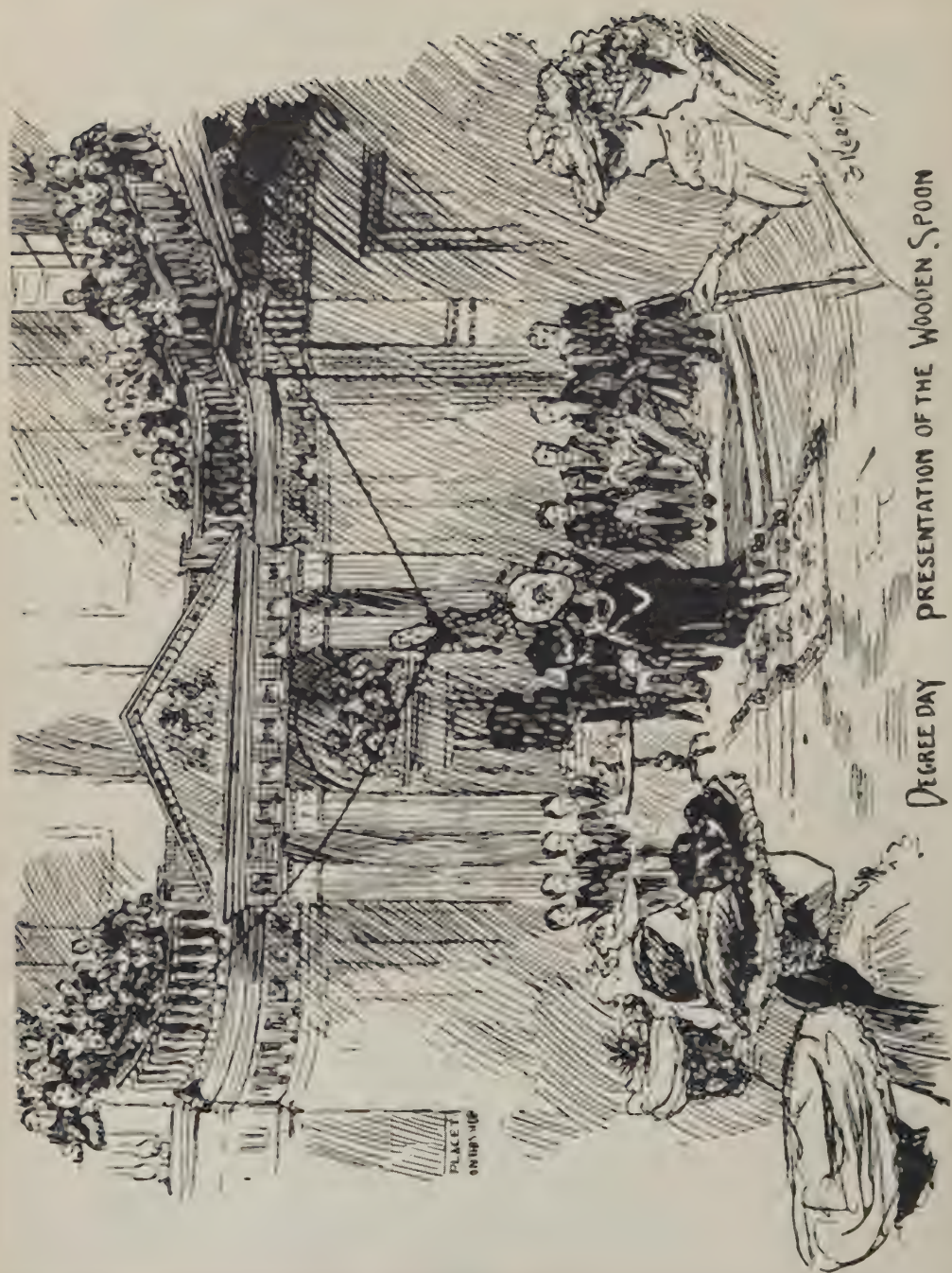
CATHARINE COLLEGE
Pensioner Fellow Comm.



PEMBROKE COLLEGE & CHRISTS COLLEGE
in Mourning. Pensioner



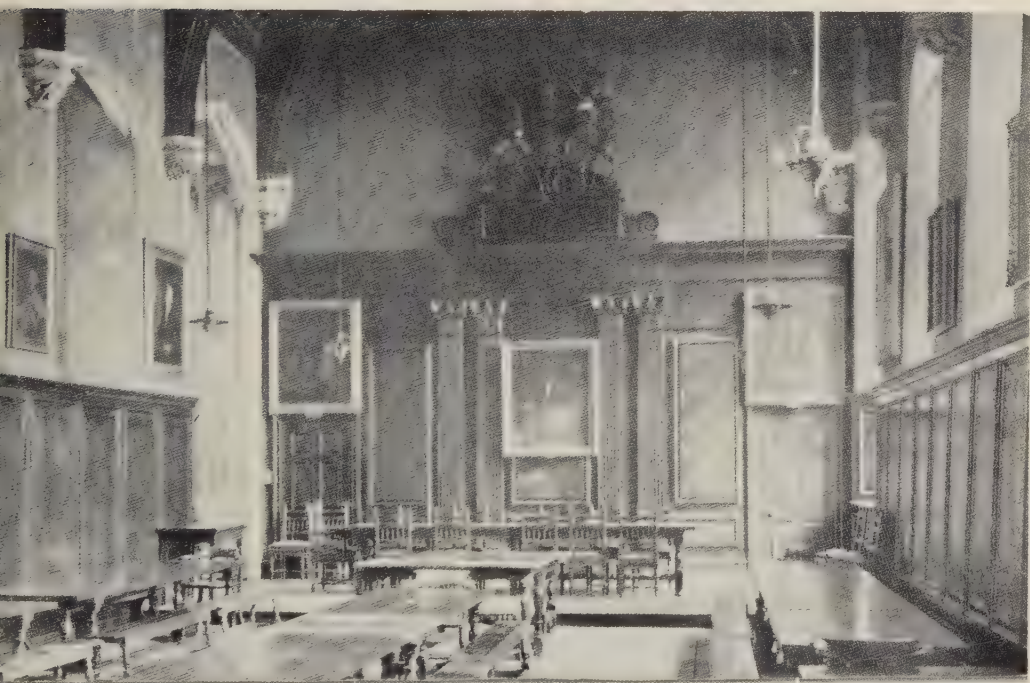
45 Undergraduates of 1864 in non-academical dress.



DEGREE DAY PRESENTATION OF THE WOODEN SPOON



47 Degree Day, January 1863. *From a painting by R. Farren.*



48 The Hall of Jesus College, Cambridge.



The Screens: where college notices are posted.



A "Sporting Door", or "Oak."



Dinner in Hall - Trinity College.



51 William Scott (1742–1808). Fellows' Cook of St John's College. *From a family portrait.*



52 Proctors and Bull Dogs.

53 A Cambridge Rag. *From a cartoon by H. Moden, c. 1902.*





54 Scene at the voting in the Senate House on the proposed admission of women to titular degrees, 1897.



55 A Mock Funeral. From a cartoon by H. Moden, c. 1902.

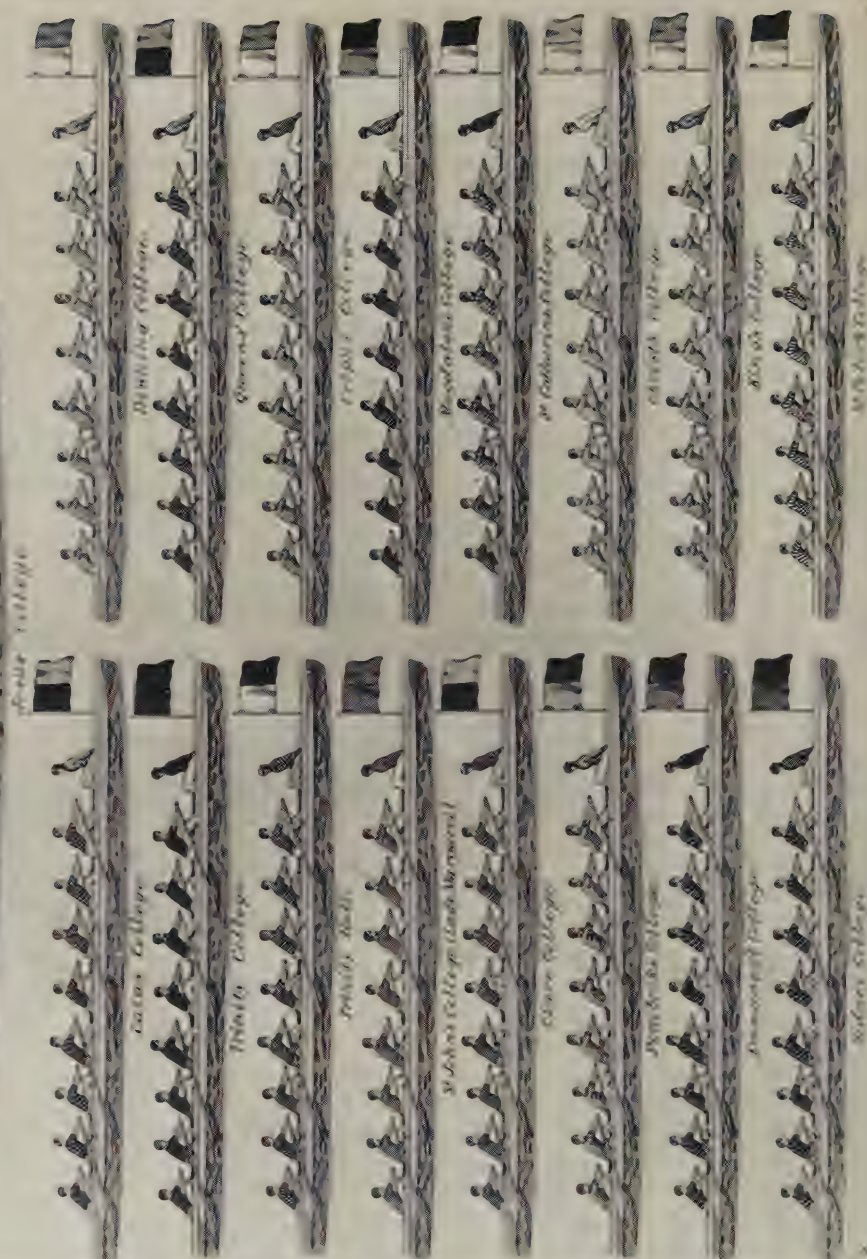


56 May Races, 1904. Making a Bump.

57 May Races, 1889. A Group of Spectators.



[illegible]





60 Nineteenth century Undergraduate's Kettle, Fire Screen and Candle Lamp.



61 The Assize Judge leaving Trinity College on his way to the University Church.



A Reading Party.



Another Reading "Party."

62 Reading Parties. *From J. Roget's Cambridge Scrapbook, 1859.*

63 The Five Miles from Anywhere—No Hurry Inn, Upware, c. 1910.



To All to Whom these Presents shall come to be read,
J. George Archdall Doctor of Divinity, and
 VICE-CHANCELLOR of the University of Cambridge,
 sendeth Greeting.

KNOW Ye, That I the said VICE-CHANCELLOR, in the name and on the behalf of the CHANCELLOR, MASTERS and SCHOLARS of the said University, have admitted, and by these Presents have allowed, *Messrs Berry & Co* Merchants of the Town of Cambridge, to be one of the Vintners of the said University, and by Himself or his Servants, in the house in which he now dwelleth, or on the premises thereunto belonging, situate and being within the said Town and University of Cambridge and the Precincts thereof, to utter, sell, and retail, Foreign Wine of all sorts whatsoever.

In Witness whereof, I have unto these Presents set my Seal of Office, to continue during the good will and pleasure of Me and my Successor. Given at Cambridge this *29th* day of *Sept* in the year of our Lord 1836

Take Notice, That the above Licence will be recalled if drunkenness or dissolute disorder is suffered in any Tavern or Place, by you or any person selling Wine under the same.

Or if any Scholars of the University are permitted to resort to and continue in any such Tavern or Place for any such purposes.

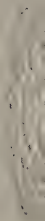
Or if you or any such person permit any Club to be held at your house by any Scholars for the purpose of feasting or drinking, or of which any Scholar is a Member, or if you or any such person furnish Wine for the use of any such Club that may be held by any Scholars at any private Lodging-house.

If any unlicensed person sells Wine within the Town or University of Cambridge, or the Precincts thereof, and any information be laid before the Vice-Chancellor, the penalty of Five Pounds will forthwith be levied on such person for each offence, according to the form of the Statute in such case made and provided for the protection of the Privileges of the said University in this respect; and that too, although any person so selling Wine may have bought the same of one of the Licensed Vintners; it being determined to prosecute all persons whatsoever, who sell Wine within the Precincts of the University, without first having obtained a Licence from the Vice-Chancellor for that purpose.

And lastly, Take Notice, This Licence will be considered as recalled, absolutely void, and of no effect, unless the sum of *Ten Pounds* is paid to the Vice-Chancellor for the time being, within one month after the expiration of one year from the date hereof, and so on from year to year, unless such annual payment is made within the same time in each ensuing year, so long as you are allowed to retain the above Licence.

George

Archdall V.C.



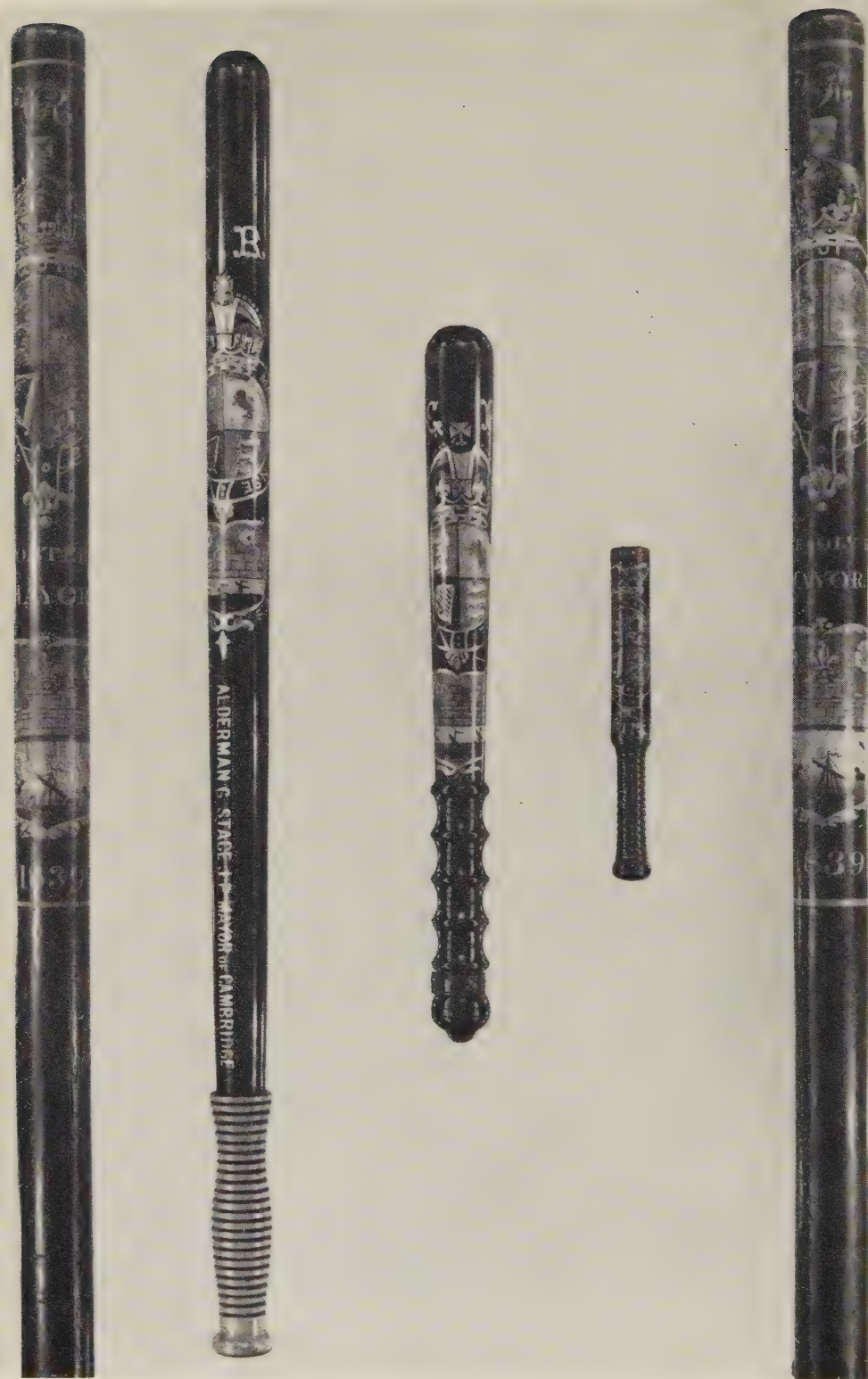
65 A Mayoral Procession, Cambridge, 1945.



66 Cambridge Corporation Maces and Mace-Rest.



67 A University Procession, 1967. The maces are swathed in black in mourning for Lord Tedder, the Chancellor.



68 Cambridge High Constables' Staves, 1839. Souvenir Truncheons, early twentieth century.

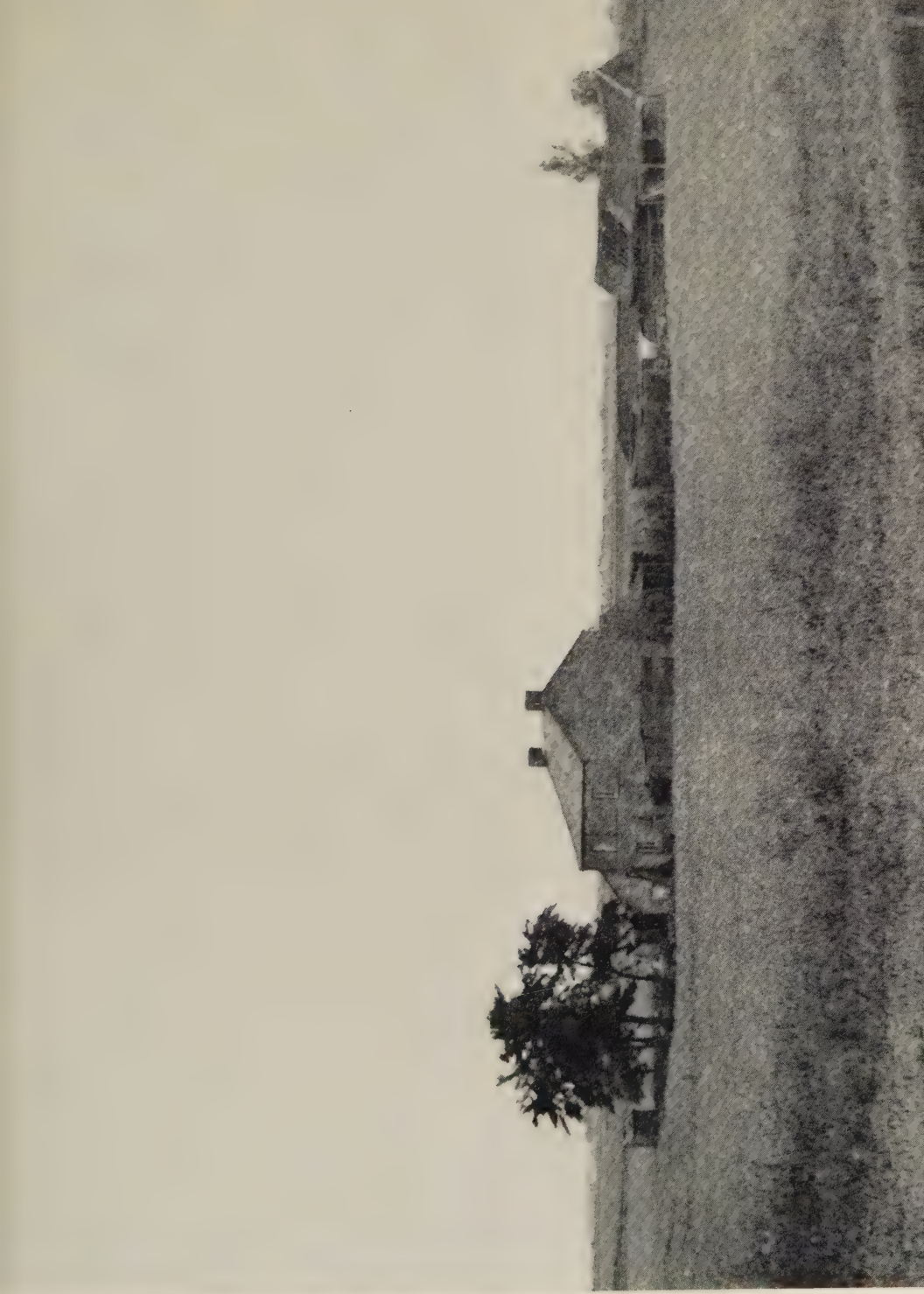


SHEPHERD'S CLUB HELD AT "THE BELL"

Charles Biggs, Chas. Love, Alfred Stead, William Hunt, Alfred Chivers, Charles Toates, B. Carter, Alfred Hill, Richard Topper, John Jeeps, Robt. Tibbett, M. Christmas, James Mowlam, Thomas Charles, George Upchurch, James Peck, John Oliver, Chas. Knightley, Chas. Biggs, junr., Albert Wolfe, Richard Knightley, Mrs. Papworth, Mrs. Upchurch, Chas. Money, Diver Cornell, William Wolfe, Dan. Chapman, Clarence Stead, Fred Fisk, Smith Lucas, Dr. Bridger, John Charles, Robert Papworth, Richard Biggs, Herbert Chivers, Fred. Hill, George Wakfield, Richard Pont, George Leet, William Charles, William Stearn, Peter Bird, Jacob Gawthrop, George Diver, John Pettit, Smith Lucas, junr., William Cornell, Thomas Chivers, Charles Stearn, George Foster, Joseph Crane, Harry Foster, Edward Todd.



70 Hospital Sunday in Soham, 1907.



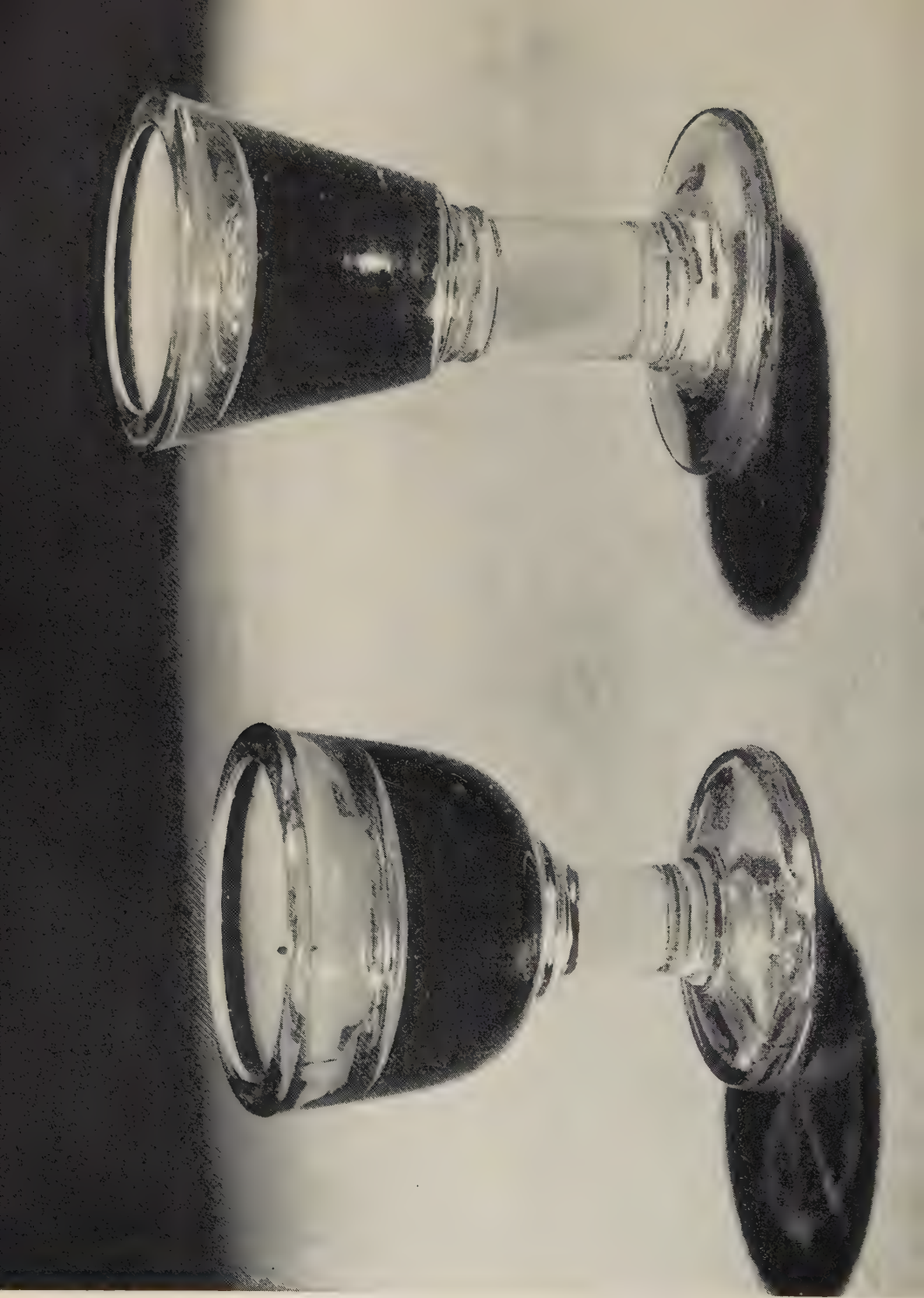
71 Manea Colony Farm, 1951.



72 Cambridge Muffin Man's Tray, Bell and Head Pad.



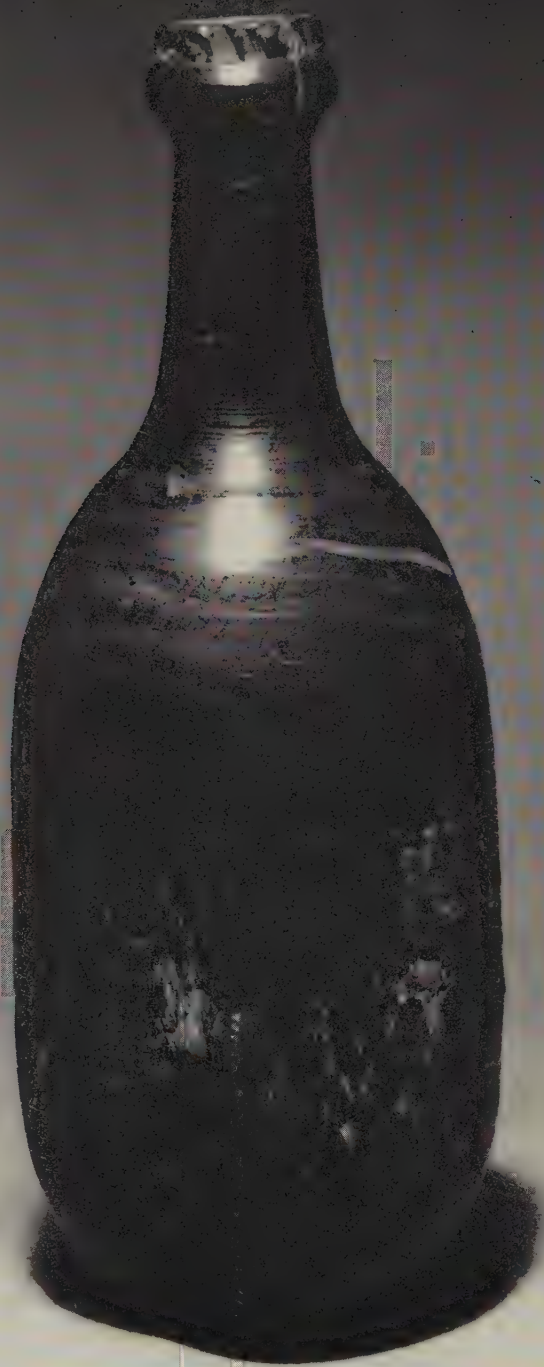
73 A Cambridge Yard Butter Seller.



74 Ice Cream Glasses used in a Cambridge sweet shop.



75 Maternity Pincushion, 1885.



76 Wooden Bottle used in observance of Cambridge Cabinet Maker's Custom, nineteenth century.



77 A Medal for a Story Teller.



78 The Tenth Club: a Cambridge Tradesmen's Bowls Club of the 1880's.

protection against the cold. Then, after the Second World War, the duffle coat, inexpensive in price, was adopted and is still popular, with or without an attached hood, for wear in winter.

In 1918, for a brief period, a few undergraduates took to wearing, in celebration of the end of the war, patchwork waistcoats made from brightly coloured oddments of material left over from the making of blazers or from samples of tailors' cloths. One of these garments, worn by the late Noel Teulon-Porter, who helped to spread the fashion, is now in the Cambridge Folk Museum. Vivid fancy waistcoats, however, usually of rich brocade, had been fashionable at the turn of the century, as they had previously been in the mid-nineteenth and in the eighteenth centuries. Plain, coloured woollen waistcoats have not entirely passed out of favour.

Walking sticks and umbrellas appear and disappear at intervals. The undergraduates of the early part of this century carried a walking-stick, usually an ash plant, when walking in the country; from c. 1900 he was freed from the necessity of wearing cap and gown on such occasions. His predecessors of the 1880s carried a walking-stick in the streets when not in academical dress; earlier still the well-dressed dandy carried his ivory- or silver-topped cane.¹ By the 1920s walking-sticks were no longer thought correct, though they are very occasionally seen today.

Umbrellas were for long despised by undergraduates, although in the 1930s it was permissible to use a large golf umbrella, striped in a variety of bright colours, when it was raining. Of recent years, however, the umbrella has returned and is carried, rolled as neatly as a businessman's, on dull days and unashamedly opened when it rains.

The custom of going hatless about the streets of Cambridge developed in the second decade of this century. In the early 1880s the hard felt hats known as Billycocks² were worn with ordinary dress in winter and straw hats, with ribbon bands in College colours round the crown, in summer. Cloth caps came into fashion early in the

¹ *The Cambridge Scrap-Book Containing in a Pictorial Form a report on the Manners . . . of the University of Cambridge . . .* (J. L. Roget, 1859) states that 'it is permissible for two days after commencing residence to carry a stick when in academicals'.

² *Billycock*: a kind of bowler hat. Prob. from William Coke for whom it was made. *O.E.D. Brewer's Dict. of Phrase and Fable* (ed. 1952) gives the word as a form of *bully-cocked*—i.e. cocked in the manner of a bully or swell; a term app. to hat in description of an Oxford dandy in Amherst's *Terrae Filius* (1721). Also (as *O.E.D.*) as the hat first used by Wm. Coke at the shooting parties at Holkham Hall, Norfolk, c. 1850, H. V. Morton in *In Search of England* derives the word from the head-coverings, called *wilcocks*, allowed, by special favour of the Pope, to be worn by the monks of Ely as protection against winter winds.

present century at a time when men frequently travelled up to the University in bowler hats which were then put aside until the end of term.

Boots were gradually replaced by shoes early in this century. From c. 1900 to 1910 there was a fashion for wearing patent leather shoes, similar to dancing pumps, with grey flannel trousers short enough to display brilliant multi-coloured socks. Shoes were worn in the 1840s according to an American undergraduate of Trinity, in his description of the undergraduate's dress of the period:¹

The Cantabs' garb generally consists of a not too new black coat (frock or cutaway), trousers of some substantial stuff, grey or plaid, and a stout waistcoat, frequently of the same pattern as the trousers. Straps are unknown to him, and instead of boots he wears easy low-heeled shoes, for greater convenience in fence and ditch jumping, and other feats of extempore gymnastics which diversify his 'constitutionals'. The only showy part of his attire is the cravat, which is apt to be blue or some other decided color, and fastened in front with a large gold-headed pin. During the middle of the day this outfit is completed by a hat of the average ugliness of English hats, but before 12 a.m. and after 4 p.m. you must superadd the academical costume.

Beards are now a current fashion among many undergraduates, as they were for a time after the First World War, when the game of *Beaver*, said to have begun in Oxford, spread throughout the country. This consisted of keeping watch for bearded men, the person spotting the first and calling out 'Beaver' scoring a point. Beards and moustaches had been fashionable in the 1850s and 1860s and at the turn of this century moustaches were favoured by many undergraduates.

The long hair popular with young men today is a return to the fashion of the early nineteenth century. Even in c. 1900, according to the *Freshman's Don't*,² undergraduates should be careful not to wear their hair too short, this being the mark of 'an errand boy rather than of a gentleman'.

With their tight-fitting trousers and jeans, polo-necked sweaters, duffle coats, long hair and beards many of the undergraduates of today dress more informally, probably, than at any other time. Elderly residents of Cambridge say that it is now more difficult to distinguish, by their ordinary clothes, undergraduates from townsmen of similar age. 'In my young days,' said a 78-year-old man in 1965, 'the town lads tried to look like undergrads, now it's the other way round. In fact, I think on the whole that the youngsters who work in Cambridge are a lot neater and tidier and better dressed than the

¹ Charles Bristed: *Five Years in an English University*, 1852.

² A book of advice for first year men.

undergrads.' It may well be that the hard facts of finance have something to do with this.

Although tailors' shops abound in Cambridge, many of them long established, it is only the comparatively few wealthier undergraduates who can afford to patronise them to the extent which their predecessors could and did. The modern man, up on a Government Grant, cannot afford to have his shirts hand-made, to buy other than ready-made trousers and jackets or, indeed, to have an extensive wardrobe of any kind. Until 1914, however, there were more who could afford to patronise bespoke tailors and shoemakers and run up bills for their fathers to pay. Among tradesmen's accounts preserved in the Cambridge Folk Museum is one of a local tailor dated 1875, setting out on five sheets of paper the clothes which an undergraduate had thought it essential to possess. These included fancy waistcoats, numerous styles of shirts, brocaded dressing-gowns, innumerable jackets and hats and several pairs of doeskin trousers with 'seats lined with swansdown'.

Examinations and Degrees

The undergraduate of today comes up to Cambridge¹ to read for an honours degree² which he will obtain by passing the necessary *Tripes* Examinations which have, over the centuries, come to exist in their present form by way of many changes in procedure, custom and tradition.

The medieval student of Arts³ had to study the *Trivium*—i.e. Latin Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. In the Lent Term of his third year he became, by virtue of his studies, a *General Sophister*⁴ and had to dispute publicly on four occasions on some subject of scholastic philosophy chosen by the Proctor,⁵ twice as a *respondent* defending his

¹ He will, by examinations taken before his arrival, have qualified for University entrance. The old Previous Examination, or *Little-Go* as it was called, is no longer required.

² An undergraduate is not now permitted to sit for an Ordinary Degree, which used to comprise a General Examination and a Special Examination, the latter consisting of papers in a special subject selected by the candidate.

³ As opposed to the student of Grammar. The last recorded Degree in Grammar was conferred in 1547/8. The conferring of the degree involved giving a 'palmer' or rod to the graduate, who, by virtue of the degree, was qualified to teach. With the rod he proceeded publicly to flog a boy who was rewarded by a gift of money.

⁴ This word was used until the late nineteenth century to denote second and third-year men who were, respectively, Junior and Senior Sophisters or *Sophs*. It is the origin of the American *Sophomore*.

⁵ See under Proctors and Bulldogs.

own thesis, twice as an *opponent* demolishing the argument of another respondent. In this way he was said to *keep his acts and opponencies*.

At the end of his fourth year, having satisfied the authorities regarding his character and general ability, he was examined orally in the Schools and, if approved, was allowed to present himself as a *Questionist*. This was a mere formality involving the questioning of students by the 'Father' or Master of Arts who represented the College. No time was allowed for argument; indeed, should the 'Father' so try to lengthen the proceedings, then the Bedell knocked loudly on the door so that the voices of the disputants should be rendered inaudible.

This ceremony took place just before Ash Wednesday¹ and from that day until the Thursday before Palm Sunday, when their degrees were made perfect, the Questionists were known as *Determiners*. At the ceremony of admission to their degrees the 'Father' again brought his 'sons' to the Schools, where an 'old Bachilour' sat on a three-legged stool in front of the Proctor. His duty was to dispute first with the 'eldest son' or senior questionist and then with the 'Father', the graduate who symbolised the paternal regard of the College which he represented in thus coming to the aid of his 'son'. Gifts of gloves were made by the questionists to their 'Father', the Proctor and the Bachelor, while the Bedells received a like gift from the Proctor.

By the sixteenth century the 'old Bachilour' had, from the stool on which he sat, acquired the name of *Tripes* and was being requested by the Proctor to be 'witty yet modest withal' in his argument. Later he is referred to with more familiarity as '*Mr Tripes*', but his part in the proceedings gradually degenerated into the reading of humorous Latin verses, known as *Tripes Verses*, which were printed² and circulated to the onlookers. Mr Tripes ceased to exist in the eighteenth century, but his verses continued to be printed and circulated on leaflets which were called *Tripes Papers*.

Examinations, meanwhile, continued to be conducted solely by means of disputations; only the subjects of these had changed, emphasis being placed more and more on Mathematics, until in 1750 it was decided that mathematical subjects only need be offered by candidates.

The lists of successful candidates today are divided into three classes, Class II in some Triposes being divided into two parts. This

¹ From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries there were two graduation ceremonies, one in January and one in July. Successful candidates in the sixteenth century wore wreaths of laurels at the winter graduations and of roses and other flowers in the summer.

² The earliest extant copy is of 1575.

custom was begun in the seventeenth century, when each College began to send in to the Proctors (or, from 1680, to the *Moderators*¹ appointed from that year to assist the Proctors in conducting the disputations) a list of candidates together with comments on their ability. From these lists were selected the men who were to *keep the acts and opponencies* and on the results of these disputations a final list was drawn up of those qualified to receive degrees. The names were arranged, though not at first in order of merit, in three classes: *Wranglers* and *Senior Optimes*, *Junior Optimes*, *Poll Men*.² From 1748 onwards these lists were printed on the back of the Tripos papers which bore on their other side the Tripos Verses, and it is in this way that the name came to be applied to the examination. Until 1858 there were two of these lists, *In Comitiiis Prioribus* and *In Comitiiis Posterioribus*, Wranglers and Senior Optimes appearing on the first, Junior Optimes on the second. From 1858 only one list was made.

In c. 1725 the Moderators had begun regularly to exercise the right, always possessed by the Proctors, of summoning for further questioning those candidates about whose ability some doubt was held. Soon this supplementary test, known as the Senate House Examination, came to be applied to all candidates, though still as a subsidiary to the disputations until, in 1763, the disputations took second place and became a means of a preliminary classification only of the candidates. In 1839 they were finally abolished. They had by this time become farcical, since it was a normal custom for respondents and opponents to meet beforehand and plan their arguments.

In 1722 was begun the practice of requiring written answers, although some or all of the questions were still asked verbally; not until 1827 did printed examination papers make their appearance.

Until 1850 the Mathematical Tripos was the only examination by which a man could qualify for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Even though the Classical Tripos was established in 1824, no candidate could enter for it unless he was at least a Junior Optime in a preceding Mathematical Tripos. The same condition was applied when the Moral Sciences and Natural Sciences Triposes were first held in 1851. Since then this condition has been waived and the number of Triposes increased to nineteen.

The man who failed to obtain a degree was said to have been *plucked* or, from the mid-nineteenth century, to have *ploughed* his

¹ Moderators are now the most distinguished of the examiners in Part II of the Mathematical Tripos.

² *Poll* from the Gk. πολλοι (many). Poll Men received an Ordinary or Poll Degree. From 1825 special papers were set for them and from 1858 they were separated from the Tripos Examination.

examination. Both words are now obsolete. Plucking is said to have come from the custom of plucking or pulling at the Proctor's gown to express objection to the granting of a degree.

It was not until the eighteenth century that an undergraduate's knowledge was tested by any form of examination before the end of his final year. Dr Powell, who was Master of St John's College from 1765 to 1775, initiated annual examinations in his College, a procedure which attracted much attention. The proposal, however, that his example be followed by the University as a whole was opposed on the grounds that candidates ought to be examined by those who taught them.¹ In 1790 Trinity College established annual examinations for its undergraduates, but not until 1822 was the Previous Examination or *Little-Go* established, this being taken then at the end of the fifth term of residence. Even the Statutory Commission set up in 1856 to inquire into the Universities did not insist on an Entrance Examination, leaving the matter to the discretion of the University.

College examinations were held in the College Halls. Charles Brister² describes the May Examination, held in June, at Trinity in 1841:

At nine the next morning the Hall doors were thrown open to us . . . The tables were decked with green baize instead of white linen and the goodly joints of beef and mutton and dishes of smoking potatoes were replaced by a profusion of stationery. Even the dais shared the general fate . . .

At one 'close your papers, gentlemen' says the examiner . . . (This examiner is never your college lecturer, tutor and of course never your private tutor.) At two the hall assumes its more legitimate and welcome purpose, dinner being thrown back two hours; at four the grinding begins again and lasts till eight; at night there is a supper put on specially for the occasion . . . Thus passed four days . . .

Results of such examinations were published in the Cambridge and the London papers.

All those whose names now appear on the yearly Tripos List have gained an Honours Degree; an Ordinary Degree is sometimes allowed to those who have failed to reach honours standard but who have given satisfactory proof of their attainment. Such men were known in the last century as *Elegant Extracts*—

elegant perhaps because they consisted largely of wealthy and well-dressed, and extracts because they were extracted (which was the actual word used) from the mass of failures.³

¹ R. F. Scott: *History of St John's College*, 1907, p. 69.

² *Five Years in an English University*, 1852, pp. 70-1.

³ Morris Marples: *Dictionary of University Slang*, 1950.

Bachelors' Degrees are now conferred on a Friday and Saturday at the end of June. The graduands, who are presented by the *Praelector* or 'Father' of their College, must wear dark suits, white ties and neckbands and their graduate hoods. They enter the Senate House in order of the seniority of the foundation of their respective Colleges and are themselves arranged in alphabetical order of their names. When the turn of each College arrives the *Praelector* extends four fingers to the first four graduands who, each grasping a finger, are led to the Vice-Chancellor, the *Praelector* pausing and bowing, cap raised, three time as he announces his 'sons' to be fit to receive their degrees. The four men kneel¹ in turn, each placing his hands between those of the Vice-Chancellor, who pronounces the traditional formula:

Auctotitate mihi commissa admitto te ad gradum Baccalaurei in Artibus in nomine Patris, Filii et Spiritus Sancti.

The new graduate rises, bows low and gives place to the next.

Cambridge is filled with proud parents on Degree Days and photographers—amateurs and professionals—are out in force, taking pictures of the newly created Bachelors in their gowns and hoods before the academical attire, mostly hired for the occasion, is returned to the tailors.

From about the year 1824 until 1909 it was the custom to give to the man whose name appeared last on the list of *Junior Optimes* a large wooden spoon,² bearing his name and the arms of his College, which was lowered by cords from the Senate House gallery as he knelt before the Vice-Chancellor. The man himself acquired the title of *The Spoon* or *Wooden Spoon*. As the custom arose in the days when degrees were conferred in January³ it has been suggested that it may have stemmed from the Plough Monday practice of collecting money in large wooden ladles or spoons, often by 'The Fool' of the dancers.

¹ The custom of kneeling to receive a degree derives from the fact that the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor originally represented Papal authority *via* the Bishop of Ely.

² See Plate 46. This drawing by F. Keene in 1905 shows the Wooden Spoon as having an oval bowl; this was the usual shape of the Spoons given in this century. A drawing in W. R. Brown's *Leaflets of Local Lore*, privately printed in Cambridge, 1897-8, depicts the Spoon as a malt shovel, which was probably its original form.

³ See Plate 47. The original painting of *Degree Day, January 1863*, by Robert Farren, is in Trinity Hall Combination Room. Many photographic copies, one of which is in the Folk Museum, were made of the painting. Most of the people in the crowd—the Bishop of Ely, Professors, Dons, etc., have been identified. The disconsolate figure standing alone in the central foreground is said to be that of an undergraduate who had failed or 'ploughed' his examination.

The Bachelor of Arts can now proceed to a Master's Degree, after a certain time and on payment of a fee, without further examinations. Nor does he, today, have to attend in person to receive the degree. Under the Statutes of Elizabeth I, however, a further four-year period of study was required, during which the Bachelor had to attend lectures and keep a prescribed number of Acts and Opponencies, disputing both with Masters and with his fellow Bachelors. In course of time the rule which said that he must stay up at the University for these years came to be less and less observed until finally it was no longer enforced. After 1855 compulsory attendance at the *Commencement*, when Masters' Degrees were made perfect, was also abolished.

Commencement Week, at the end of June and the beginning of July, was a season of great gaiety, especially in the eighteenth century, although its glories began to fade in the 1830s and 1840s. Henry Gunning¹ wrote of the concerts and oratorios which could be heard, of the visits to Midsummer Fair on the Saturday evening, and of the Commencement Ball held on the Monday night. On Commencement Sunday all the Doctors wore their scarlet gowns and after the University Sermon they, with their wives in pretty dresses, the Masters and the Bachelors and the noblemen in their brilliant gowns, walked for half an hour on Clare Hall Pieces, peered at through the railings by crowds of townfolk and villagers.

The Commencement Ceremony was, before the building of the Senate House, held in the Church of St Mary the Great; during the rebuilding of the church between 1478 and 1519 the churches of the Augustinian Friars and the Franciscan Friars were used. The church, arranged like a theatre for the occasion, was packed with doctors and masters as well as by large numbers of visitors eager to hear the disputations.

Each incepting Master, with his 'Father' representing his College, at his side, read the thesis he proposed to defend and this was taken up by the youngest Master of Arts—the man admitted last at the ceremony of the preceding year. He was called the *Prevaricator* and was required to preface his argument with an oration in which he was permitted, by custom, to satirize the leading members of the University or the outstanding events of the past academical year. In this way he was, as it were, the Mr Tripos of the Commencement, and he not infrequently called upon himself the wrath of the University by his abuse of the freedom of language which was allowed him.

¹ *Reminiscences of Cambridge*, I, 25.

In the year of Restoration (1660) . . . it appears that the Prevaricator's gibes were launched at all present without mercy and without distinction . . . He tells Proctors that one of them is an ox and the other an ass, proving it by a syllogism. . . . A member of St John's is told that his face is like a sun-dial standing upon a post; and that his nose can never be put into verse, inasmuch as it is more than six feet in length.¹

At the Commencement of 1714 the Prevaricator was Roger Long, M.A., who delivered his speech partly in Latin prose and partly in English verse. That year the ladies present were placed in the chancel pews of the University Church and not in the galleries usually allotted to them. In his verses Long expressed what he assumed the ladies to be feeling at being 'locked up'—the pews of that period being of the box type with doors—where they could 'neither see nor be seen':

Some of us for these three months have scarce been able to rest,
For studying what complexion would become us best;
And several of us have almost pinch'd ourselves to death with going
 strait-lac'd
That we might look fuller in the chest and more slender in the
 waist.
And is it not now intolerable, after all this pains and cost,
To be coop'd up out of sight and have all our finery lost?
We've endeavoured to know the reason of all this, to the utmost
 of our power,
What has made the Doctors contrive to take us all down a peg
 lower;
And we find 'tis only because last time their wigs were disoblig'd
 by a warm shower.
As for that misfortune, the Ladies may e'en thank the Prevaricator,
Who was so extremely arch they were ready to burst their sides
 with laughter.

Such verses² were scarcely suited for delivery in a church and it is not surprising that the Prevaricator's speech did not survive the removal of the Commencement ceremonies to the Senate House. The last public Commencement was held in 1730.

Hall and High Table

The typical College Hall³ with its raised dais at one end for the High Table, the rows of tables set longitudinally below, and the screens or

¹ *College Life in the Time of James I*, ed. from D'Ewes' *Diary* by J. H. Mardsen, 1851, pp. 84-5.

² The speech is given in full in C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, IV, 115-16.

³ See Plate 48.

partitions at the other end with the gallery above, is the counterpart of the hall of the late medieval or early Tudor country house. Kitchens and Butteries lie opposite the *screens*,¹ divided from them by the screens passage which gives access to courts at either end. From the dais a door leads to the Combination Room.²

Dinner in Hall is a survival of the old monastic community life and provides, in theory if not in fact, the one opportunity in the day for undergraduates and dons³ to meet. Space is limited, however, and at least two sittings have perforce to be the rule, a practice already made necessary in some Colleges in the last century.

Whereas the breakfasts and luncheons provided in Hall⁴ are served informally, dinner remains, in varying degrees according to individual College custom, an occasion of some dignity. The crowded conditions in which undergraduates have to eat do not, however, lend themselves to gracious manners; indeed, the only way almost for some men to reach their seats is by clambering over the tables.

The dons enter from the Combination Room in procession, the undergraduates being required, by the custom of some Colleges, already to be assembled. A Fellow or the senior Scholar reads the Latin Grace; in some Colleges undergraduates do this in turn. The meal is served by waiters—part-time men for the most part, who carry out other duties in the College during the day or who work elsewhere in Cambridge. The service is supervised by the Butler, among whose duties in the past—at St John's College, for example, until 1886—was that of reading aloud in Hall the names of any College livings⁵ which were vacant.

College Feasts are held each year in Hall on the anniversary of the Foundation and are attended by the Master, the Fellows and distinguished guests. In Jesus College is still held in the Easter Term a Feast provided by the will of Tobias Rustat, who died in 1693, and

¹ See Plate 49 from *A Cambridge Scrap-Book*, 1859. The book consists solely of pen-and-ink sketches with brief captions. The name of the author-artist (John L. Roget) appears as A Special Commissioner. Notices are still pinned up in the screens.

² Counterpart of the Oxford Senior Common Room. The name derives from the fact that the *Combination Paper* giving the names of the University Preachers was drawn up in the room.

³ *Don*: by transference from *Don*: a Spanish title confined to gentlemen of high rank and, from 1660, to a head, fellow or tutor of a College. *O.E.D.*

⁴ The undergraduate can take either or both of these meals where he pleases. He must however, according to the rule of his College, dine in Hall on a certain number of evenings in the week. The provision of breakfasts and lunches in Hall has increased since 1939.

⁵ *Livings*: ecclesiastical appointments. Many of the Colleges have the right of appointment to such benefices.

is buried in the College Chapel. Under the terms of his will each Fellow present receives five shillings, usually in the form of a crown piece.¹ At Corpus Christi College has been held, since 1949, the Queenborough Feast endowed by Lord Queenborough and attended by representatives of the Corporation and citizens of Cambridge. The annual audit of accounts was also the occasion, in the past, for Audit Feasts, noted for the strong ale—Audit Ale—served at them. College Feasts provide opportunities for using the silver plate, drinking vessels, etc., many of them of great antiquity, presented over the centuries by various benefactors.

The custom for undergraduates to dress for dinner in Hall has not been observed since the first quarter of the last century. The more careless dress of the men of today has not infrequently been commented upon by elderly Cambridge residents and by College servants who have served generations of students. Professor Pryme, who came up to Cambridge in 1799, recalled:²

It was usual for undergraduates, or at least the more particular ones, to dress daily for the dinner in hall in white waistcoats and white silk stockings, and there were persons who washed them for us, as things too special for a common laundress. There were two or three undergraduates who wore powder . . . the rest of us wore our hair curled. It was thought very rustic and unfashionable not to have it so. . . .

Although the dress may have been more formal in the past, the meals themselves were served in more careless fashion. In the early nineteenth century the waiting at table was done by gyps and bedders,³ the latter wrapped in shawls, since the only source of heat in the Hall came from a charcoal-burning brazier. The undergraduates carved the joints themselves; the meat was served with potatoes and vegetables, but if a man wanted cheese or a sweet he had to *size* for it—that is, obtain it from the kitchens at his own expense. An American's impression of dinner in Trinity College in 1859 is given by William Everett:⁴

The college is so immense, five hundred and twenty-five undergraduates, that even this monstrous hall will not contain them all. There is, therefore, two-thirds of the year, a second dinner for the Freshmen, equally good and hot, but at the less convenient hour of five. But even with this, the pushing, fighting, hacking over joints, in a scene where the attendance is of the roughest, the eating of the plainest, no regular seats are assigned, and such little niceties as napkins are unknown, make the

¹ F. C. Brittain: *History of Jesus College*, 1940.

² *Autobiographical Recollections*, 1870.

³ See Plate 50. From *A Cambridge Scrap-Book*, 1859.

⁴ *On the Cam*, 1866, pp. 101–3.

college hall of Trinity pretty dismal, except for a very hungry man . . . On one side of the room is a table where the fare is a good deal neater, if not better, and the attendance more abundant and quiet. It is that of the foundation scholars, the best students of the year, who receive this dinner gratis on condition of extra regularity at chapel. . . .

But your attention is attracted to the lower part of the hall,—what is that large silver vessel going from hand to hand? It is an immense drinking cup, filled with a peculiar brand of strong ale, brewed by the College, and known as Audit, because every year a new tap is broached on the day when the accounts are audited. It is only produced on those few special days in hall, and is greatly sought after.

The times of dining in Hall have changed considerably over the years, becoming progressively later from the 10 a.m. of the sixteenth century to 2.15 p.m. by 1800. Four o'clock then became the usual hour until, in this century, the hour advanced gradually to seven o'clock and later. The changes in time were not always popular, especially with older Fellows, and some Colleges took longer than others to adapt to the custom of late dining.

When dinner was at midday or in the early afternoon, supper was served in Hall, although few undergraduates attended, preferring to hold *Sizing Parties* in their own rooms. Until c. 1800 a *Sizing Bell* was rung at eight o'clock as a signal that the *Sizing Bill* of Bill of Fare was ready. Each guest at a Sizing Party then selected his dishes from the Bill at his own expense and took them to the rooms of his host, who supplied bread, butter and cheese, together with rum, beer and punch.

Fellows in Holy Orders who, on Sunday evenings, often took services in the churches of near-by villages, were provided, until late in the last century, with supper in Hall. At St John's College the gathering was known as 'The Curates' Club'; at Christ's, 'The Apostolic'. The fare was generally of the plainest and varied little.

Wine parties were popular with those who could afford them. Professor Pryme, writing¹ of the time when he entered Cambridge in 1799, tells us that

The habit of hard drinking was almost as prevalent as it was in county society. It was usual to invite a large party to partake of wine and a moderate dessert after hall. The host named a Vice-President and toasts were given. First a lady by each of the party, then a gentleman and then a sentiment. I remember one of these latter: 'the single married and the married happy'. Some of them were puns and not very decorous. Everyone was required to fill a bumper² to the toasts of the President, the Vice-President and his own. . . .

¹ *Autobiographical Recollections*, 1870, p. 49.

² *Bumper*: a cup or glass filled to the brim, esp. for a toast. *O.E.D.*

Another drinking custom described by the Professor was that of *Buzzing*, which, he says, is 'unknown today but was then universal':

When the decanter came round to any one, if it was nearly emptied, the next in succession could require him to finish it; but if the quantity left exceeded the bumper, the challenger was obliged to drink the remainder and also a bumper out of the fresh bottle. There was throughout these parties an endeavour to make each other drunk, and a pride in being able to resist the effects of the wine.¹

A drinking custom peculiar to College Halls is the *Sconce*. Originally this was the fining by the University or College authorities of undergraduates for some breach of discipline, but since the beginning of the last century the punishment has been imposed by the undergraduates themselves on their fellows for some breach of etiquette. In at least one College the president of the undergraduate tables has the traditional authority to *sconce* a late arrival and can order a *sconce-cup* containing a large quantity of beer which must be drunk by the offender without setting down the cup until it is empty. The latest sconce was imposed on 25 October 1966 at Downing College, when an undergraduate, who had led a chorus in Hall, before dinner, of *Happy Birthday* to greet a companion, was ordered to drink four pints of beer in four minutes without a pause. After fifteen seconds one pint had been consumed, but then the drinker took his lips away from the cup to take breath and was told by the butler that he had failed.

College meals are now prepared and cooked by chefs and kitchen staff employed by the College. Until the last century, however, the kitchens were leased by contract to cooks who ran them for their own profit, taking on apprentices. In some Colleges there was one cook for the Fellows and one for the Scholars. The running of College kitchens was often a family business in which son or nephew followed father or uncle, becoming men of some substance. The Scott family, for example, for many years ran the kitchens of St John's College. William Scott² (1742–1808), the Fellows' Cook, was admitted a Freeman of Cambridge in 1779 and made a Common Councillor in 1778. His eldest son, William, was educated at Winchester and at

¹ *Autobiographical Recollections*, 1870, pp. 50–1.

² Plate 51. Members of a collateral branch of the family served as cooks of St John's later in the last century. The first Scott to settle in Cambridge was Thomas, son of a Border laird, who while he was up at the University fell in love with the daughter of a Cambridge baker whom he married in 1547. For this he was disinherited by his father. (K. Scott: *Scott, 1118–1923* . . . *Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Border Family of Scott*, 1914.) Direct descendants are still living in Cambridge.

Jesus College, of which he became a Fellow. Other sons had distinguished careers in the Army and Navy. One son, Thomas, followed his father in St John's and was admitted a Freeman of Cambridge in 1816.

Lord of the Revels

Until 1882 Fellows of Colleges were forbidden to marry, so for the greater part of the year the College was their home. Many students, too, were unable by reason of bad roads, long distances from their homes and personal poverty, to leave Cambridge during the shorter vacations of Christmas and Easter. The Colleges remained open, therefore, during these periods. The twelve days of Christmas were devoted to feasting and rejoicing under the supervision of a lord of the Revels, known in earlier times as the *Christmas Lord*.

In 1556, on 27th December:

the Lorde of Christes College came Christmas lyke thyther with a drum before him, &c.,¹

while on the 29th, the Feast of St Thomas a Becket:

certayne companyes of the kinges college went abroad and shot gonnys in the streetes.¹

On New Year's Day of the same year there was

a show in trinite college in ther courte of the wyninge of an holde and takinge of prisoners, with waytes, trumpettes, gonnys and squybbes.¹

On Candlemas Day:

the Christmas lorde at trinite College was had from the church to the Hall with drom . . . &c.,¹

In 1549 it was forbidden to anyone to be appointed *Dominus Ludorum* in any College at Christmas,² while in a sermon preached in St Mary's Church on St Thomas's Day, 1609, William Ames, Fellow of Christ's College,

took occasion to inveigh against the liberty taken at that time, especially in such colleges who had lords of misrule,³ a pagan relic which . . . remaineth only in England.⁴

At Trinity College one of the Masters of Arts was ordered to be placed in charge of the Christmas festivities in the College and to rule

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 111-22.

² *op. cit.*, II, 32.

³ The Christmas Lord was often known by this title.

⁴ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 34.

over the Hall and Chapel throughout the twelve days and again on Candlemas Day: for this he was to receive a fee of 40s.

It was, perhaps, in memory of such times when the Hall would have been filled with revellers that it was the custom until the 1890s at St John's College to keep a few of the gas lights burning in the Hall from St John's Day, 27 December, until Twelfth Night.¹

Issues of the *Cambridge Chronicle* in the last century often contained accounts of the celebration of Christmas in the Colleges. In that of 2 January 1841, for example, was the following:

The Christmas festivities at St John's College have been kept up this year with the usual splendour and hospitality . . . As usual the enormous Christmas Pie for which this College is celebrated made its appearance at supper in the Combination Room, backed by the Boar's Head, Chine of Pork and other Christmas fare.

The pie was probably that 'huge and excellent game pie with an ornate super-structure' which Dr T. G. Bonney² remembered in the 1860s and 1870s as occupying the centre of the side-table in the Combination Room whither the Fellows and their guests retired after dinner. He recalled, too, the special punch served by the Fellow whose turn it was to be Master of the Revels, and the '*sherry beaker*' which was drunk. This was concocted mainly of hot sherry with calves-foot jelly dissolved in it. These Christmas festivities in the College were discontinued after 1881, because by that time fewer Fellows remained in Cambridge over the Christmas period.

May Week

At the end of the May Term, when examinations are over, comes the period of celebration, traditional since the 1870s, known as May Week, commencing on the first or second Wednesday in June with the Bumping Races,³ which take up the afternoons and early evenings until the Saturday. Of recent years there has become established the tradition of the singing of Madrigals by the University Madrigal Society on the first Wednesday evening from punts moored on the Backs of Trinity College.⁴ Large crowds gather to hear the singing which ends with the punts drifting slowly off to the accompaniment of *The Silver Swan*.

¹ R. F. Scott: *History of St John's College*, 1907.

² T. G. Bonney: *Memories of a Long Life*, 1921.

³ See below under *Sport*.

⁴ Originally under King's Bridge.

On the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the second half of the week are held the College May Balls. These began, in the various Colleges, at various dates since the 1890s—the first at Corpus was not held until 1912. They are now very elaborate affairs, with hired marquees erected in the Courts and world-famous dance bands playing for the dancing which goes on till the early hours of the morning. The supper and buffet tables are beautifully decorated, there are flowers everywhere and, in the College gardens, coloured lamps, floodlights and braziers.

For many years¹ it has been the tradition at St John's to serve mock swans at the May Ball suppers. The swan's necks are made of wax which is first melted and poured into a special mould; the eyes and bills are painted in black and orange. The 'bodies', contrived of cold turkey, 'float' on a 'lake' of green aspic decorated with mock water lilies. The College, in common with Christ's, King's, Trinity and, Jesus, formerly had its own game of swans and its swan mark.

In the early morning many of the May Ball revellers go by punt to Grantchester, or by car to other villages, for breakfast, returning between nine and ten o'clock, so on the three days of the Balls the streets of Cambridge are filled with men and girls still in evening dress almost up to midday. Even when dependent on a Government Grant many undergraduates find it possible to stay up after term has officially ended to 'keep May Week' at least once during their time up at the university and to pay the not inconsiderable price of a double ticket for a Ball.

Cricket matches, concerts by College Musical Societies, plays by the various College Dramatic Societies, the annual revue of the Footlights²—all these are held in May Week—a period which bridges the gap between the ordeal of the examinations and their soon-to-be-published results.

Proctors and Bull Dogs

The duties of the Proctors in earlier days included the regulating of the hours of disputing in the Schools; the destruction of bad herrings offered for sale; the purchasing of vestments, bell ropes and candles and the patrolling of the streets to repress disturbances. By the Elizabethan Statutes of the University they were given powers to arrest and imprison prostitutes, a right which was often the cause of

¹ The present Kitchen Manager of the College is unable to trace the date at which this custom began; it was already established in 1924.

² See under *Games, Sports and Pastimes*.

much bad feeling between the Town and the University authorities. They are now responsible for the maintenance of order and discipline within the University.

There are two Proctors, a Senior and a Junior; two Pro-Proctors have been appointed since the last century because of the increased number of undergraduates living in lodgings; there is now a third who deals with motor vehicles and aircraft. All are appointed by the Colleges in a prescribed order.

The Proctors are installed at the beginning of the academic year at the same time as the Vice-Chancellor, whom they always attend at the Senate House and at University Sermons and other official occasions. At the installation the Senior Proctor receives a Linstock¹ and a Partizan;² the Junior a Halberd³ and a Butter Measure. This last is a metal trough, 33½ inches long, divided at unequal distances by pieces of metal and with a long handle attached at the top by a rounded hinge. A strip of iron slides over the flat side of the measure and the two pieces fit into a thin iron sheath. A modern case has been made to protect the measure. The Butter Measure is a reminder of the powers exercised from 1432 until 1856 by the University over the weights and measures of Cambridge, where butter used to be sold by the yard.⁴ The *Taxors*, who once ceremonially sealed the weights and measures each year, no longer exist.

When they attend special ceremonies in the Senate House the Proctors wear hoods over the *ruffs* or capes of black silk which go over their gowns. At University Sermons the *ruffs* are replaced by squared hoods with three buttons in front. When he patrols the streets at night each Proctor or Pro-Proctor wears his usual academical dress with white neck bands.

Each Proctor is accompanied by two officers known as Bull Dogs. These are College servants usually chosen as being especially fit men who can run well and so are able to chase an erring undergraduate who may try to elude 'capture'. At night the Bull Dogs wear black suits and bowler hats, but on ceremonial occasions they add heavy blue beaver⁵ capes ornamented with gilt buttons, collars and thread,

¹ *Linstock*: a staff about 3 ft long, having a pointed foot to stick in the deck or ground and a forked head . . . *O.E.D.*

² *Partizan*: . . . a long-handled spear, the blades having one or more lateral cutting projections . . . *O.E.D.*

³ *Halberd*: a kind of combination of spear and battle-axe consisting of a sharp-edged blade ending in a point and a spear head mounted on a handle 5-7 ft. long. *O.E.D.*

⁴ See Appendix III: *Food and Drink*.

⁵ *Beaver*: a felted cloth used for overcoats. *O.E.D.*

and replace the bowler with a tall silk hat. On these formal occasions the heavy bound volumes containing the University Statutes, are carried. Plate 52 shows the Senior and Junior Proctors holding the Statutes; the Bull Dogs have the ceremonial 'weapons', and the Butter Measure is held by the second man from the right. The beaver cloaks of the Bull Dogs are neatly folded over their arms.

Each Proctor and Pro-Proctor has the right to enter licensed premises and they also go into cinemas and dance halls if it is necessary for the maintenance of discipline. Until undergraduates were no longer required to wear gowns in the streets at night much of the Proctors' time was taken up in seeing that the regulation was being observed.

The usual fine imposed for any misdemeanour is 6s. 8d.—half the medieval mark—for undergraduates and 13s. 4d. for Bachelors of Arts, but the Proctor can, at his discretion, demand more.

Rags

The University Rag, though it may seem to belong to the present rather than to the past, has its history of changing customs and tradition. It was about the turn of the century that the word *Rag* came to acquire its modern meaning of an organised piece of fooling by University students. For long before that, when students wished to give expression to their high spirits, there were always means of doing so in the frequent outbreaks of rioting between Town and Gown, which involved actual fighting between townspeople and members of the University. These were often bloody affairs, leading to severe injuries on both sides and sometimes even death. In 1868, when a case of rioting occurred at the time of the Parliamentary Election, two Johnians were trapped by a mob of angry townspeople outside the gates of Christ's College, which had, in the interests of safety, been closed. The College Porter opened them to allow the two men to take shelter and was himself struck and killed by a stone thrown by the crowd outside.

Sometimes sporadic outbursts of fighting went on for two or three days on end. Josiah Chater¹ wrote in his diary on March 3rd, 1846, that there had been a 'rare row' that evening in the Town Hall and in the streets. The disturbances were repeated on the following day,

¹ Josiah Chater, whose diaries cover the years 1844-83, was living in 1846 in Market Street, so that he had ample opportunity of witnessing Town *v.* Gown fights.

while another took place on March 7th, when four undergraduates were arrested. On March 9th Chater wrote:

The four university men were tried this morning at the Town Hall; one was fined £1 10s. 0d; one 10s. and one 2s. 6d. and pay their costs; the other was let off. There were a very great many people on the Market Hill and the University men vow vengeance to the police tonight. About half past eight the Gownsmen assembled in the Rose Crescent to the amount of, so near as I could guess, 300, and from there they paraded the streets till a little after nine, and then they began to kick up a row—they had tremendous cudgels. . . . The Proctors and Masters were all out, but to no purpose. There has not been such a tremendous row for many years, but after they were all taken in the Gownsmen threw glass bottles on to the Townsmen's heads, and water and stones, which so enraged the Townsmen that they went to all the Colleges and smashed the windows all to pieces—but Christ's has got it worst. There is above 80 panes broken.

When the famous dwarf Tom Thumb visited Cambridge in 1846 there were ugly scenes as the University men tried to prevent townspeople from attending at the Town Hall to see the 'General'. In February 1848 Chater again referred to Town and Gown rioting. On the 18th the Gownsmen 'marched about the Town in regiments of about 2 or 3 hundred with pokers and all sorts of weapons'. One undergraduate had his leg broken and many others were 'very much hurt'. But such bitter feelings simmered down at the end of the last century and the only incidents of this nature which have occurred in this century have been on November 5th, and even this night, for the past few years, has passed quietly. Outbreaks of hooliganism which have occurred on occasions in 1967 on the Market Hill, late at night, have not involved undergraduates.

The Rags which replaced the Town and Gown riots were at first little more than acts of hooliganism and vandalism occurring, usually, at the time of some event of national importance. The first Cambridge Rag, in the true sense of the word, was probably that which took place in 1898 on the occasion of the conferring of an Honorary Degree on Lord Kitchener. To celebrate the event on his behalf undergraduates lit bonfires on the Market Place and elsewhere, feeding them with wood obtained by the wholesale destruction of wooden shutters, palings and anything else they could lay their hands on. Similar scenes occurred at the Relief of Mafeking and on Armistice Night after the First World War. Plate 53 shows a Cambridge cartoonist's impression of the Mafeking Rag. Another cartoon, issued in postcard form at the same time, recorded an incident which occurred on that night when an irate housewife, broom in hand, drove off a

mob of undergraduates who were trying to tear up the fence in front of her garden.

Such Rags, however, were not the amusing and entertaining affairs we usually think of in connection with the word, because much personal loss and even suffering was caused to the owners of shops and houses in Cambridge.

A less destructive and more entertaining Rag was held in 1897 when the Council of the Senate voted on the question of admitting women to titular degrees. Effigies of women students wearing spectacles, blue stockings and hideous clothes were suspended above Trinity Street and placed on bicycles hung from the upper windows of a nearby bookshop.¹

The Rag which is really a hoax on a large scale has occasionally been planned. The best known occurred in 1905, when the Mayor and Corporation and the University authorities received the 'Sultan of Zanzibar' and conducted him and his entourage to the Guildhall, the Senate House and other places of interest. Among the last was King's College Chapel, which presented a problem to the hoaxers, who dared not remove their turbans and so reveal themselves, nor, with propriety, could they have left them on. They managed to evade the issue by stating, through their 'interpreter', that their religion forbade them entering a foreign place of worship.

In 1952 came another hoax. Well-printed and seemingly authentic notices were sent to all Freshmen telling them that the University Chamberlain would address them from the Senate House steps at two o'clock on the afternoon of October 8th. The secret of the hoax leaked out, but not in time to prevent a number of men from turning up to hear the entirely mythical officer.

From time to time a carefully planned Rag, demanding great technical skill, has been perpetrated. One such took place shortly after the First World War, when a German gun, which had been presented as a trophy to Jesus College, was stolen. The gun, which stood in Jesus grounds near the corner of Victoria Avenue, was taken one night by some Caius College men, pulled through the streets and taken into their College on the request for a seldom-used door to be opened to admit it.

One morning in May Week 1958 a car was discovered parked on the roof of the Senate House. It had been placed there during the night by undergraduates, who had carried out the manoeuvre, which demanded great skill and daring, completely unseen. It was removed, after two attempts, by the Civil Defence.

¹ Plate 54.

The years between the two World Wars were the vintage years for Rags which were spontaneous, which entertained both onlookers and participants alike, and whose secret was known only to a few—the three essentials of a true Rag.

In 1924 Tutankhamen's Tomb was opened in Egypt; a similar opening took place in Cambridge, too, only here the 'tomb'—the public lavatories on the Market Place—was that of 'Toot and Come In' and yielded an astonishing variety of curious objects to the 'excavators'.

In January 1926 about two dozen 'Cossacks' visited Cambridge at the invitation of the 'University Russian Society', which, at that time, most certainly did not exist. Speeches, in broken French, were made on the Market Place and the 'Russian National Anthem', the tune and words of which proved to be a popular song, closed the proceedings.

The year 1927 saw the 'first marriage according to the New Prayer Book' performed on the Market Square. The 'bridal pair' first drove round the square in an old cab, greeted on their way by members of 'Dr Jeremiah Peabody's Purity League' and of 'The Undergraduates' Society for Equal Wrongs for Women'. After the wedding ceremony the 'Anti-Marriage League' delivered speeches on the evils of modern marriage and two healthy-looking undergraduate 'twins' were baptized.

In the same year Joanna Southcott's¹ Box was opened by a number of 'Bishops', who were accompanied by numerous 'female' relatives and overgrown 'babies'. The contents of the box proved to be a quantity of red tape, a teddy bear, football boots, 'tracts' in the form of race cards, a leg from a shop window display figure and a number of examination papers which were torn to shreds to the applause of the crowd. Joanna Southcott's 'spirit' moved about the crowds with flapping paper wings while the box was being opened.

Undergraduate exuberance again found an outlet in 1927, when, on November 17th, shortly after midday, the centre of Cambridge was suddenly filled with men bowling wooden and iron hoops, using walking and hockey sticks and children's wooden spades to guide them. More time was spent in retrieving the hoops from under the wheels of vehicles than in keeping them moving.

Between the two World Wars was instituted the Pavement Club,

¹ Joanna Southcott (1750–1814) announced herself to be the woman spoken of in Revelation xii. She dictated doggerel prophecies and bequeathed a box to be opened in time of national emergency. It was opened in 1928 and found to contain a horse pistol and unimportant papers.

whose members were invited to relax from their studies by sitting down in King's Parade to play leisurely games of Halma, Ludo, Chess and various card games. It often took the police a considerable time to get traffic moving normally after drivers had slowed down to watch the proceedings.

There was one reversion in these years to the old hooliganism and senseless display of violence. It occurred in 1921 and was occasioned by the defeat in the Senate House of the proposed admission of women to full University status. On the declaration of the result of the voting a column of about fifteen hundred undergraduates marched to Newnham College and wantonly defaced the bronze gates erected in memory of Miss Anne Clough, the first Principal. The act was instigated by a graduate who later pleaded guilty and was severely reprimanded by the Vice-Chancellor.

In the same year, 1921, arose the custom of holding on the Saturday nearest to November 11 the Poppy Day Rag in aid of the funds of the British Legion. These Rags follow the pattern set by the Rag Days of the younger Universities, where such events have for some years been held usually in aid of the teaching hospitals attached to such Universities or Colleges. In Cambridge there are processions of decorated vehicles each staging incredible scenes; there are cabaret shows at intervals all through the day in College Courts; hot dogs, coffee and other refreshments are sold in the streets; there are battles with soot and flour between rival punts and generally there is an undergraduate who dives in flames into the river from Magdalene Bridge. Of recent years such days have ended with a dance on Midsummer Common in the evening and, in accordance with modern custom, a Poppy Day Queen has been elected. Each College has had its Poppy Day Committee and there has been great rivalry between the various Colleges, who vie with one another in the production of spectacular shows and in trying to collect the largest amount of money. The British Legion has benefited by several thousand pounds each year from the Rag.

The year 1966, however, saw a break in this forty-five-year-old tradition. Over the past two or three years many undergraduates have expressed the opinion that not all the money collected should go to the British Legion—some should be divided among equally deserving charities. After polls had been held in the University and in the City it was finally decided that in 1966 the first *Camrag* would be held on November 19th, proceeds going to the British Legion, the United Children's Emergency Fund and the Cambridge Society for Mentally Handicapped Children.

The Rag was duly held and differed little from the preceding Poppy Day Rags. A Camrag Queen was elected, all the usual shows and spectacles were arranged and the first Rag Magazine, *Blew Bore*, was printed and circulated throughout the country and even abroad. It was hoped that £12,000 would be raised, but the final figure fell far short of this. It may be that Cambridge citizens are not fully in sympathy with the change; indeed there are some undergraduates who are opposed to it. Perhaps, too, the Rag followed too closely on Poppy Day itself when people had given generously to the house-to-house collections arranged by the British Legion. It remains to be seen what the future of *Camrag* will be.

It was the custom, from the later nineteenth century until the 1930s, for *Mock Funerals*¹ to be staged when an undergraduate was sent down for some breach of discipline. One such funeral was held a few years ago, but it was a poor affair compared with the elaborate ones of the past.

The 'body' of the undergraduate, attended by a surpliced 'clergyman', was usually carried from his College on a board and placed in a waiting cab which then drove off towards the railway station, followed by the 'choir' and a crowd of 'mourners' in various strange costumes. The journey would be enlivened by strident music, the singing of hymns and popular songs and the reading of 'Lessons' from Gray's *Anatomy* or some other textbook according to the subject which the expelled man had been reading. At the station the 'corpse' would be placed in the guard's van and the 'nails knocked in his coffin' by undergraduates who clambered on the roof and hammered on it with brooms. On one occasion in 1920 the 'body' escaped from the van and the huge crowd of mourners stormed the buses waiting outside the station and rode back into the centre of the town, followed by cars filled with shouting undergraduates. They eventually caught up with the 'dead man' as he was solemnly walking back in procession to the Market Place with the 'clergyman' and the 'choir', where a collection was made for him.

Sport

Organised sport in the University, apart from Rowing, is of comparatively recent date. Not until the 1880s did the Colleges begin to provide sports grounds, although after 1848, when Frank Fenner

¹ Plate 55.

turned his private cherry gardens into a cricket ground henceforth to be known as Fenner's, cricket matches were played there. Previously both cricket and football were played on Parker's Piece,¹ part of which had been levelled by some of the Colleges and relaid as cricket pitches.

The playing of football was rendered difficult in the early nineteenth century by the fact that members of the various public schools were accustomed to different rules. Finally one set of rules² was drawn up in Cambridge for the convenience of players.

In the sixteenth century the game had been forbidden to be played outside the Colleges following a fight in 1579 between undergraduates and inhabitants of Chesterton at a football match played in the village. In 1604, again to prevent possible trouble between townspeople and members of the University, James I prohibited 'games at loggets,³ nine-holes,⁴ and all other sports and games . . . whereby the younger sort are or may be drawn or provoked to vain expence, loss of time or corruption of manners'.⁵

The customary relaxations of the early nineteenth-century undergraduate and his predecessors included fishing and wildfowling, hunting, riding and tandem-driving. Gunning⁶ tells us that in his day 'Cambridge afforded the most extraordinary facilities' for shooting.

In going over the land now occupied by Downing-terrace you generally get five or six shots at snipes. Crossing the Leys you entered Coe-Fen; this abounded with snipes. Walking through the osier-bed on the Trumpington side of the town you frequently met with a partridge and now and then a pheasant . . . If you started from the other corner of Parker's Piece you came to Cherryhinton-Fen; from thence to Teversham, Quy, Bottisham and Swaffham Fens. In taking this beat you met with great varieties of wildfowl . . . You scarcely ever saw a game-keeper but met with a great number of young lads who were on the lookout for sportsmen from the University, whose game they carried and to whom they furnished long poles to enable them to leap those very wide ditches which intersected the Fen in every direction.

¹ Before Hobbs's Pavilion was erected on the Piece in 1928, tents were erected for use as changing rooms by players.

² These form the basis of the present Association Football rules.

³ *Loggatt, Loggett*: an old game, played by throwing pieces of wood at a stake fixed in the ground; the player who is nearest the stake wins. *O.E.D.*

⁴ *Nine Holes*: *a.* A game in which players endeavour to roll small balls into nine holes in the ground. . . . *b.* A similar game played with a board having nine holes or arches. *O.E.D.*

⁵ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 321.

⁶ *Reminiscences of Cambridge*. He entered Christ's College as a Sizar in 1784.

The non-athletic and those who could not afford to ride, hunt or shoot, relied on walking¹ for exercise and took long constitutionals known as *Grinds*, the Madingley, Coton and Grantchester Grinds being the most popular.

The staple exercise is walking, wrote Charles Bristed² in 1852, between two and four all the roads in the neighbourhood of Cambridge—that is to say within four miles of it—are covered with men taking their constitutionals. Longer walks of twelve or fifteen miles are frequently taken on Sundays or days succeeding an examination. The standard of a good walker, is to have gone, not once, but repeatedly, fifteen miles in three hours, without special training or being the worse for it next day. . . . There is not so much riding as might be supposed, considering that there is not one Englishman in five hundred of the University-going classes, who cannot ride and does not like to. The expense is the reason generally alleged . . . There is sufficient business, however, for five or six livery stables, those who keep their own horses being mostly the Noblemen and Fellow-Commoners, and a few of the Fellows. . . .

Today the facilities provided cater for all sports and for all needs, for those of the man who plays for his University side or the one who merely wishes to play a friendly game of squash or tennis on one afternoon a week.

The custom of awarding Blues in recognition of distinction at sports arose in the last century. Only ten³ Full Blues are awarded and only to those who represent their University against Oxford. Half-Blues are awarded in a number of other sports—Badminton, Swimming, Lacrosse, Real Tennis, for example, and Colours for Archery and Small-Bore Shooting. Women, too, may be awarded Full Blues.⁴

In the Lent Term come the knock-out competitions, known as ‘*Cuppers*’, in the winter ball games. The match between the surviving finalists is an occasion of great excitement. Large and noisy crowds attend the matches and on the walls and pavements in the centre of Cambridge appear such legends as

JOHNS FOR CUPPERS EMMA FOR CUPPAS

which are often still legible, despite frosts or rain, many weeks later.

¹ In wet weather College Cloisters were crowded with men taking their afternoon exercise.

² *Five Years in an English University*, 1852.

³ For Rowing, Rugby and Association Football, Hockey, Cricket, Golf, Athletics, Tennis, Squash, Rackets and Boxing.

⁴ Those who play *v.* Oxford receive a Half Blue automatically. Women who have played in a University match and have also shown special merit in one year are awarded a Full Blue.

Rowing takes pride of place in University sport, culminating in the inter-College May Races, known as *The Mays*, now held on the first or second Wednesday in June and on the three following days. At the end of the Lent Term, also on four days, are rowed the Lent Races or *The Lents*.

Because the Cam is a narrow river the Lents and the Mays have perforce to be *Bumping Races* in which each boat tries to bump or touch the one in front.¹ When this occurs both pull into the side to allow the following boats to row on, and on the next day bumper and bumped change places. Should three or more boats bump simultaneously or one, as it rows past two which have pulled into the side, bump the one ahead, then an over-bump is said to have been made. In the first case the rear boat goes ahead of the others concerned. To show that a bump has been made the cox of the successful boat holds up his hand or snatches a branch from one of the trees on the river bank and fixes it to the stern of his boat. This is probably a replacement of the custom, begun in 1828, of boats going down to the starting-point with the flags of the College Boat Clubs flying from the sterns. In 1834 it became a rule that successful boats should return with their flags up.

The origin of these races is owed to two Colleges—Trinity and St John's—which in 1826 put on the river the first eight-oared boats ever seen on the Cam. The two crews competed daily in extempore rowing trials. Each steerer had a bugle on which, after the two boats had rowed casually upstream there to lie hidden in wait for each other, he blew a loud blast to announce his whereabouts. Hearing it, the other crew, if it were behind, would come up and try to bump the challenger.

The practice was quickly followed by other Colleges. In 1827, when the University Boat Club was established, Jesus, St John's and Trinity Colleges competed, the Jesus crew in a six-oared boat, St John's in an eight-oared and Trinity in two boats, one eight-oared and the other ten-oared. In 1828 most of the Colleges, having each founded a College Boat Club, entered the races. Trinity Boat Club, now called First Trinity, was the earliest, founded in 1825; the Third Trinity was established in 1827. The Second Trinity, which was composed apparently of reading rather than of rowing men, did not survive after 1877, when its two boats were taken off the river.

¹ Plate 56.

Following an incident in the last century when No. 4 in a bumped boat was killed by the sharp prow of the boat making the bump, a gutta-percha knob, called a *bobble*, has been fixed to the prow of each boat.

The boats used in the early days of racing were large and clumsy and were not used solely for racing purposes. They often served as pleasure boats to take parties of undergraduates on picnics and water parties to Ely and even as far as King's Lynn. Outriggers were introduced in 1846 and sliding seats in 1873, although the last were not used in the Lents until 1920, for that year only. They were in regular use from 1929.

The course of today's Lents and Mays is from Baitsbite Lock to the Pike and Eel Inn at Chesterton. The first course, however, over which they were rowed was from Chesterton Sluice to the Fort St George Sluice,¹ where, under an Act of 1703, locks had been erected to improve the river for trading purposes. The starting posts were set 90 feet apart on the Chesterton side, so that to get round the river bend at this point the boats had immediately to steer right across the river. This often enabled an inferior crew to bump a good one, so to prevent this a *Bumping Post* was erected near the old Roebuck Inn, now Roebuck House. No bump was allowed before this was reached.

In 1835 the races were held for the first time over the present course,² following the removal of the locks. The starting posts at Baitsbite were set 140 feet apart and the starting signal was given by a gun fired three times at three-minute intervals, the first time being when the head boat had reached its moorings, the last time being the signal to start. This system replaced the old method whereby a wooden-legged man named Bowtell used to scull in an old skiff³ alongside the boats as they came up. When the word 'Ready' had been passed down until every Captain had passed the old man, Bowtell fired his gun.

The progress of the crews was often hindered by the presence on the river of the barges of lighters which carried goods between King's Lynn and Cambridge. The lightermen, traditional enemies of the undergraduates, frequently refused to get out of the way and even deliberately blocked the course with their barges. Towing ropes attached to the horses pulling the lighters were another hazard.

From the four boats which raced on 26 February 1827 the number of boats entering the Lents and Mays has annually increased. As early as 1832, when only nineteen boats competed, an attempt was

¹ The Fort St George public house on Midsummer Common stood, until 1835, on an island between the two Sluices.

² The course was shortened slightly after 1846, when the railway bridge was built over the Cam. When a new bridge was erected in 1859, replacing the old one, the river was deepened and widened, so the course reverted to its present length.

³ *Skiff*: a long narrow racing boat for one oarsman, outriggered, usually fitted with a sliding seat and covered in fore and aft with canvas. *O.E.D.*

made to form them into *Divisions*, a custom not firmly established until 1854. The boat connecting the Divisions was named, as it is still, the *sandwich boat*. In Lent 1852 three divisions were formed and over the years the number has increased, until in 1966 there were eight. The races of the First Division are rowed last in the Lents and Mays, the final leading boat being the *Head of the River*. The position of the boats at the end of the May Races is kept by the crews of the following year.

Every College Boat Club must enter at least one boat, but with the increase in the size of the University most Clubs, over the years, came to enter more than one. In order that more boats can be put on the river *Getting-on Races* are held, rowed on a knock-out system and by timing, not by bumping. The winner of these rows a bumping race against the bottom boat of a College which has more than one boat 'on', and if a bump is made the bumped boat goes off the river and the successful one takes its place at the bottom of the Division.

In the early days of organised racing the races took place on a greater number of days than now. In 1827 there were thirty-two race days; in 1829 there were nineteen, but by 1865 the number had dwindled to nine. These days were spread over the months of February, March, April, May and November until 1842, when March and May became the established months. Not until 1883 was any race rowed in June, a change which has led to the seeming contradiction of holding May Races in the wrong month. Four years later, in 1887, the Lents and Mays were separated; there were still at that time only two Divisions in each.

When the records of the University Boat Club were first kept, from December 1828, the boats were recorded under their names as often as under those of the Clubs which owned them. So we read of the 'Dick Haterick', 'Adelaide' and 'Tobacco Pipes and Punch Bowl' as the names of the third, fourth and fifth Trinity boats in 1832. 'The Lady Margaret'¹ and 'Tally-ho' were the names of St John's College boats in 1833, while in 1830 Queens' College owned the 'Tea-Kettle'.

Today a boat may sometimes be referred to by the name, perhaps, of the person who may have presented it to the Club. In the May Races programmes, probably for the entertainment of spectators, some boats are given amusing names; these boats are usually those in the lower Divisions which are crewed by less serious oarsmen—Rugger and Soccer players, medical students and so on. Amusing names of the crews also appear in the programmes. Thus in 1966

¹ This name was adopted for that of St John's College Boat Club.

Clare's sixth boat appeared as 'World Cup Willy' crewed by Eduardo (bow), Bilko, Shenst, Dickie, Dr Noll, Batman, Budgie, with Nig-Nog as stroke and Bevo cox. Queens' third boat was 'The Saints and Sinner', St Catharine's eighth the 'I'm Alone'.

The May Races naturally attract a greater number of spectators along the towing-paths from both City and University than do the Lents. Until early in this century it was customary for large crowds¹ to go by private or party boats to Ditton to picnic and watch the races. Ditton Paddock then still belonged to the Rectory and the Rector used to set up two large hired marquees and provide strawberry-and-cream teas, thereby increasing his stipend and allowing the hour which elapsed between the rowing of the then only two Divisions to be pleasantly whiled away. On the Chesterton side of the river, almost opposite the Paddock, a small fair was held, its swings and roundabouts again providing a means of passing the waiting time in an entertaining fashion.

It became the custom, at the turn of the century, for an unofficial race² to take place back to Jesus Locks between the spectators' boats immediately after the last or sandwich boat had passed and the races were over. There were no rules and unshipping the rudder of a nearby boat was not considered unfair play. The more cautious boat-owners and hirers wired on their rudders or sat on them, and so crowded was the river at the beginning of the scramble home that boats were pushed away by hand or propelled by the oarsmen using their oars as punt poles. On one occasion an undergraduate, enraged by being obstructed by another boat alongside his, leaned over and, seizing the tie of an elderly gentleman seated in the steering seat of the offending craft, proceeded to choke him until he was happily prevented by a companion from so doing.³

The Procession of Boats

From c. 1831 until 1892 it was the custom, when the Mays had ended, to hold, one early evening, a picturesque Boat Procession in the stretch of river between King's and Clare Bridges.

The authorities of King's College allow their large lawn to be trampled by 'the profane crowd' for this one day of the year, and the meadow on the west side of the river with the bridges are reserved for ticket-holders. The eights row past in order, adorned with flags and flowers, then return and lie side by side in line across the river; when the line is formed all except those in the first boat stand up, lift their oars in the air and cheer, while the band plays 'For he's a jolly good fellow'; next

¹ Plate 57.

² Plate 58.

³ Information from Lady Keynes.

the second boat sits down and receives a like ovation, and then all the other boats in succession; after which the Head of the River again leads the way to return to the boat-houses, and the company separate.¹

Spectators of the last Procession in 1892 were entertained by the sight of the Lady Margaret (St John's) boat, which carried only two oarsmen and the cox. On each of the six empty seats was a short pole bearing a placard with the words SENT DOWN. The stern of the boat bore a similar placard printed with the instructions

FOR FURTHER
PARTICULARS
APPLY TO
MESSRS COX &
CALDECOT

The two individuals named were officers of the College who had disciplined the six members of the crew.

Cannibal Boats

A Cannibal Boat was the nineteenth-century name for the second boat of a College. The name is said to be a corruption of 'Cannot pull'—*to pull* rather than *to row* being the more commonly used expression at that period. Records of Magdalene College Boat Club claim, however, that the word was first applied by First Trinity to their crew in 1832 because the Captain, Carlton, was known as 'Cannibal Carlton' to his friends.

The word gained a second meaning later in the century, when it came to be applied to a College second boat which bumped its own first boat, an act for which a fine was imposed by the University Boat Club.

Slogger Races

Slogger or *Slow-goer* races were first held in 1844, when so many boats appeared on the river that it was decided that twenty-eight should row on the regular race days and the rest on alternate days, the first boat in these trial races being entitled to row last on the normal race days. The boats which rowed in this early form of *getting-on races* were referred to as *Sloggers*.

¹ Charles Dickens: *Dictionary of Cambridge*, 1885, p. 12. The eights were wider and heavier craft in the last century; crews would be unable to stand up in the boats of today.

Bump Suppers

On the last day of both the Lents and Mays it is traditional that each College Boat Club holds a Bump Supper. The rejoicings in the College which has gone Head of the River are naturally exuberant, but Bump Supper nights are by no means quiet in any College. The custom seems to have begun about the middle of the last century.

Burning the Boat

The custom of the ceremonial burning of a boat, usually on the occasion of a Bump Supper, has largely had to be abandoned owing to the present-day high cost of a racing eight. It has, however, been observed on a few occasions within recent years by the College which has gone Head of the River, an old boat being consigned to the flames.

Gaining One's Oars

Crews of boats which have made a bump on each night of the Races are entitled to keep their oars. Each man usually takes his to a sign-writer who decorates the blade, which is painted in the colour of the undergraduate's boat club, with the names of the crew, their weights, the date and the number of bumps made, and the College crest. If the oar belongs to a man whose boat has gone Head of the River, the University crest is added. These trophies are hung on walls of the men's rooms and usually carefully preserved by their owners when they leave the University.

Other Races

The first race for small boats was the Colquhoun Sculls, founded in 1837, although the race was rowed, until 1842, not on the Cam but on the Thames. The first sculling boat—a long, narrow, outriggered craft sculled by one man with a pair of sculls and known in Cambridge as a *funny*—was launched on the Cam in 1839. It survived its first trip without accident, although many people had predicted that it would capsize.¹ Scullers at first used to blow horns to warn people ahead to get out of the way.

Other small-boat races² followed the Colquhoun Sculls, the events being for some time decided by a series of bumping races, a custom which was not finally abandoned until 1871. The University Fours, founded in 1849, replaced the match which, until 1848, it had been the custom to hold between the Captains of the College Crews and the

¹ H. Armytage: *The Cam and Cambridge Rowing*, n.d. (c. 1887), p. 43.

² e.g. The Magdalene Pairs (1844); the Clinker Fours (1890); the Lowe Double Sculls (1894).

University Crew. It was in 1829 that, on the challenge of Cambridge, the first Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race was rowed, the race taking place at Henley on June 10th. The second race, ten years later, was rowed from Westminster to Putney, but not until 1856 did the contest become an annual one.

Rowing Costume

The crews of the Colleges are distinguishable by the colours of their short-sleeved singlets, striped or plain, which are worn with white shorts, these replacing the long white trousers of the last century, shown on Plate 59. The cox of today wears a peaked cap, the rest of the crew row bare-headed. Until early in this century it was customary for crews, on their way to and from the races, to wear low-crowned straw hats known as *boaters*, with a ribbon round the crown in the colour of the wearers' clubs. The cox wore his when in the boat. Flowers were often pinned to the ribbon bands, members of the Lady Margaret Boat Club (St John's) choosing marguerites in honour of the College foundress, the Lady Margaret Beaufort.

The modern *Blazer*, now a universally worn garment, owes its origin to St John's College. It was the jacket worn by members of the Lady Margaret Boat Club, and since the Club's colour was scarlet the coat could indeed be said to 'blaze'. The more sombre jackets worn by other crews when off the river were simply known as *boating coats*, but the new word quickly became popular and is now applied to jackets which are black or dark blue.

The Undergraduate

During one year at least of his time up at the University the undergraduate *keeps* in his College or in one of the increasing number of College hostels which are being built to relieve pressure on accommodation. *To keep* is the ancient term commonly used in Cambridge with the meaning of *to live*, but its use by undergraduates is now declining, together with that of gyp room for which, especially in the hostels, the word *kitchen* is often heard.

One year or perhaps two may have to be spent in lodgings or *digs* in a private house licensed by the University Lodgings House Syndicate, and these digs may be a considerable distance from a man's College. It is the usual practice for first-year men, or Freshmen, to be provided with rooms in College in which they will feel less lonely in the first period of settling-in at the University.

The traditional set of College rooms, leading off staircases from the Courts, consists of a bedroom, a keeping room and a gyp room. Many of these sets have, however, over the past few years been divided up into smaller units of bed-sitting rooms (which is the usual accommodation provided in many of the hostels), together with gyp rooms. The alterations to the old sets have meant the disappearance of the outer door or *oak* which, when an undergraduate was away from the rooms or wished to be undisturbed when he was in them, he closed or *sported*. This outer door was placed in front of an inner one and was opened with a *sport key* which was spade-shaped with slits cut in the blade. When this was inserted in an inverted T-shaped opening in the oak, it lifted a latch on the inner side (see Plate 49). Even before many of the old oaks had been done away with these old locks and sport keys had been replaced by Yale-type locks in many of the sets.

Until the Second World War the landlady who let University lodgings had to provide a separate bedroom and sitting-room for each undergraduate, but demands on accommodation are so heavy that bed-sitting rooms can now be occupied provided they have been approved by the authorities.

Until the same period the man who kept in College took over the furniture in the rooms at a charge for each item which was decided by a valuer, the price becoming progressively less over the years as the condition of the furniture deteriorated. Today adequate furnishings¹ are provided by the Colleges as part of the fees for residence and undergraduates have no need, unless they wish, to purchase more. Their predecessors, however, often added to the somewhat meagre and often shabby furniture in their rooms by buying desks, tables, chairs and other things in local shops, to which they resold them when they were no longer required. Before 1939 Cambridge townspeople wishing to buy second-hand furniture waited until August or September, when there was always a good supply from the Colleges in the local stores. In the eighteenth century it was a common practice of the shops to allow a third² of the original price paid when a student returned furniture, purchased at the shop, at the end of the year.

Tea- and coffee-making and a certain amount of cooking can be done in the gyp rooms, so the undergraduate provides himself with the necessary equipment, either bringing it from home or, more

¹ The new hostels have more amenities than the older sets of rooms and are proportionately more expensive. There are still rooms—especially bedrooms—in some of the older Colleges which have changed little in the past fifty or so years.

² *Thirling*: a custom practised at the Universities where two-thirds of the original price is allowed by the upholsterers to the students for household goods returned them within the year. Grose: *Dict. of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1796.

usually, buying it locally. The beginning of each academical year sees Woolworths and other shops in Cambridge crowded with freshmen buying saucepans, kettles, cutlery, cups, saucers, plates and frying-pans, of which good stocks are always laid in by the stores in October.

Pictures, ornaments and similar furnishings can be added to rooms according to the occupiers' tastes. The final appearance of a modern undergraduate's keeping room differs in many ways from that of his predecessor's earlier in the century. The pipe-racks, tobacco jars, cushions, ornaments and various bric-à-brac adorned with the College or University crest, so popular until the 1930s, have largely vanished, although they are still admired and, when possible, bought by Americans up at Cambridge. Until the Second World War there was a well-known Art Needlework shop in Cambridge which always had, each October, a plentiful supply of cushion covers and fire screens¹ embroidered with the crests of the various Colleges or traced ready to be worked by devoted mothers, sisters or aunts. China bearing the crests of the Colleges was popular, too. Early in 1966 a local china store disposed, in their annual sale, of a large quantity of crested cups, saucers, plates and jugs, the amount of dust which had first to be washed from each article showing how long the goods had been in stock and out of favour.

Modern amenities have been added at various dates to College rooms. Gas and electric fires; central heating and electric lighting have been installed and bathrooms provided, though in many Colleges the men have some distance to walk to their baths. The traditional story is still remembered of the elderly don's comment, when baths were first proposed, that they were scarcely necessary, since the undergraduates were in residence only for a few weeks each term. Baths were formerly taken in round, shallow tin baths in the students' rooms, the water being brought and later emptied by the bedmakers.²

Metal candle-holders with curved metal shades or reflectors were in common use as reading lamps.³ At Selwyn College oil lamps were

¹ In this century the shop sold the crest-embroidered linen panel ready for mounting behind the glass of the modern upright screen designed to stand in front of the fireplace when no fire was alight in the grate. In the last century it sold materials for working the banner-shaped screens which could either be hung on a bracket screwed to the mantelshelf or placed in a frame for standing on the table. Such screens shielded the user's eyes from the glare of the fire. See Plate 60 for a mantelshelf screen, made for an undergraduate in 1890 and embroidered with the University crest.

² An illustration in Roget's *Cambridge Scrapbook* (1859) shows bedmakers drawing water from the fountain in the Great Court of Trinity.

³ Plate 60.

in use as late as 1924. When the old iron-barred grates were in use many undergraduates bought locally made copper kettles,¹ one side of these being flat and provided with a hook for attaching to the grate bar. Water could conveniently be heated, and kept hot, in these without the kettle tipping over on the coals or getting blackened by smoke at the bottom.

The hour at which undergraduates must be in College or in their lodgings at night has become progressively later over the years. In the seventeenth century many College gates closed at eight o'clock in winter and at nine o'clock in summer, although these times were sometimes extended by one hour. It was the custom, then, for the Master to retain the keys at night. The eighteenth-century student was fined 6s. 8d. for being out after eleven o'clock, the fine being doubled if he repeated the offence, while if he persisted in the habit he was publicly admonished on the third occasion and expelled on the fourth. Ten o'clock remained, however, until recent years the hour for closing gates and the rule applied also to lodging-houses, where special locks or iron bars had to be fixed to ground-floor windows to prevent illegal entry after hours by the occupant of the rooms or any of his friends. The closing hour for College gates today is, for the most part, eleven o'clock, although, of course, men can obtain permission to return at a much later hour than this. Individual Colleges have their own gate rules, but the general tendency over the years following 1945 has been to allow greater freedom than was permitted in the past. This freedom must certainly be appreciated by the keepers of licensed lodging-houses, of whom many elderly ones can recall the times when their own evening leisure hours were affected by having to secure windows and doors by ten o'clock. Among privileges now allowed to undergraduates is that of entertaining girl friends in College rooms and in lodgings until late in the evening, according to the rule of their individual Colleges. This represents a great break with tradition, though it must be remembered that many of the ancient rules governing the social life and behaviour of students were laid down in the days when the average age of University undergraduates was lower than it is today.

'Don't by any chance speak to girls without introduction' was the advice offered by 'A Sympathetic B.A.'² in the *Freshman's Don't*, one of

¹ Many of these were made by Alexander Macintosh, coppersmith, of Market Street, Cambridge, who in 1884 acquired the ironmongery business of J. Beales, also in Market Street. The firm of Macintosh continued until 1963. Plate 60 shows one of these kettles.

² J. B. Storey of St John's. B.A. 1896.

several booklets, serious and humorous, published in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to guide the first-year man through his first difficult weeks at the University.

The University authorities dislike to see a member of the University talking to or walking with a young lady in the street, especially at night, and they are likely to ask for an introduction. Of course there can be no possible objection to a man being with his fiancée, sister, etc. . . . but if the desired introduction is likely to be at all awkward, it is advisable to have no dealings in the streets with members of the opposite sex.

This appeared in a serious *Guide to University Life* published in 1920 and shows how great a change there has been since then. Undergraduates now 'date' Cambridge girls, women students, nurses and the many foreign girls who come to Cambridge in large numbers to attend the many Language Schools established in the City over recent years.

Today the *Varsity Handbook*¹ appears each October to provide the first-year man with all the information he needs about the clubs he can join, the whereabouts of lecture rooms and science laboratories and the best places in the City in which to eat. Advice on social behaviour is not, however, given in this publication, as it was in the earlier guide-books which provide us with so many insights into the social customs then prevailing.

Don't be ready to think a man has cut you. Cambridge salutations are always distant

warned the *Freshman's Don't*. This custom of 'distant salutations' was further elaborated in Dickens's *Dictionary of Oxford and Cambridge* in 1885:

When two men meet in the street or road who have nothing to say, they do not stop and say it, nor even mutter in passing, 'Do?', but the tiniest nod or the least perceptible motion of the near eyelid suffices. The fresh springy youth . . . need not let himself be frozen by the seeming coldness and formality of the social atmosphere; and must never imagine himself cut.

Handshaking, both books advise, must be kept for the first and last occasions of meeting an acquaintance, but the deference due by Freshmen to their seniors of the second year must be strictly observed. It was customary, until the beginning of this century, for second-year men to leave cards at the rooms of new arrivals; such calls had to be punctiliously returned by Freshmen.

¹ Published by the weekly newspaper *Varsity*.

There seems to have been a certain amount of etiquette observed in the last century in the serving of sugar. The *Freshman's Don't* warns first-year men that sugar tongs and tea cosies¹ are best left at home.

Lump sugar in Cambridge is generally passed round and taken with the clean finger and thumb

says Dickens's *Dictionary*, and the same practice is thought worthy of comment by Charles Bristed:²

How the custom of taking sugar with the fingers should prevail at the University and nowhere else in England, is somewhat singular, especially as almost every man owns a sugar-tongs when he comes up, but such is the case.

Dickens's *Dictionary* also warns Freshmen of certain sartorial pitfalls to be avoided:

In the matter of hats there is safety in the ordinary hard round felt hat . . . Scotch bonnets,³ wide-awakes⁴ and other soft things may be donned later according to taste, but the diffident ones had better begin with billycocks. Morning coats may be brought in the portmanteau, but the short tailless jacket looks more natural on the back . . . by the more crushing laws of custom gloves, sticks and umbrellas cannot be carried at the same time.

Freshmen, like new boys in schools, did not escape traditional hoaxes being played on them or, occasionally, the undergoing of some form of initiation. In the seventeenth century, for example, there existed a ceremony called *Salting* in which Sir Symonds D'Ewes, of St John's College, took part, as we learn from the book⁵ based on his unpublished diary:

Symonds has not left it on record on what day he underwent the initiatory ceremony of 'salting' but it would probably be about this time (1618). It appears, from scattered notices in the diary, that when salting took place all the undergraduates were assembled in the Hall and that certain senior Sophisters⁶ were selected from them as 'Fathers', to each of whom were assigned a number of freshmen as Sons, and that by these was enacted a sort of burlesque upon the public examinations in the schools; those who 'did ill' being compelled to drink a certain

¹ These padded covers to place over the teapot to keep its contents hot could be bought in Cambridge embroidered with crests of the Colleges.

² *Five Years in an English University*, 1852, p. 51, n.

³ Cloth caps.

⁴ *Wideawake*: applied jocularly to a soft felt hat with a wide brim and low crown. O.E.D.

⁵ *College Life in the Time of James I, as Illustrated by the Diary of Sir Symonds D'Ewes* . . . ed. J. H. Marsden, 1851.

⁶ See above under *Degrees and Examinations*.

quantity of salted beer. . . . The practice was in some degree recognized by the authorities, for Symonds informs us that they 'exceeded in Hall' on account of the salting. And we find not a few instances of the charge for salting introduced into the tutors' accounts. Symonds paid 3/4d.

The author of the *Freshman's Don't* warns his readers:

Do not attend Divine Service at the Pitt Press.¹ The music is not good.

It was a common custom to point out the University Press to Freshmen as the University Church, its Gothic architecture certainly adding weight to the mis-statement; first-year men must, surely, have been more naïve in the past than they are today. Similarly, Freshmen were told that they must go up to the top of Castle Hill 'to watch the magnificent spectacle of the Term divide';² while generations of men have been informed that M.A.s and Doctors may play marbles on the steps of the Senate House on Degree Days and that anyone wearing Lincoln green has the undisputed right to practise archery in Petty Cury. So long, in fact, have these last two fictions been maintained that they are now almost believed in as based on historical fact.

'Don't ask your seniors to breakfast before they ask you', advises the *Freshman's Don't*, reminding us of the breakfast or *brekka* parties so often given until the first decade of this century and which, together with the tea parties of the 1880s and 1890s, constituted the chief entertainment of the majority of undergraduates, wine parties being given by the fewer and wealthier. These breakfasts, in the last century, were substantial affairs of cold fowl, grilled plaice, sausages, muffins and coffee; they often lasted two or three hours, terminating in the drinking of beer.

The food was brought by kitchen porters from the College kitchens to the host's rooms or lodgings; it was, until c. 1939, a familiar sight in Cambridge to see large wooden trays, covered with green baize, being carried on a porter's head or shoulder to lodging-houses where undergraduates were entertaining friends to breakfast, lunch or dinner. The landlady could herself have prepared the meal—indeed, she was obliged to do so every day in the case of breakfast until this meal could be taken in most College Halls. Even if she was spared the task of preparing and cooking for a luncheon or dinner party, however, she was faced with a meal of four courses arriving all together from the College and with the problem of keeping hot, on her

¹ The printing works of the University Press have now moved from Trumpington Street, but the old building is retained for use as a book display office, etc.

² Mid-Term is known as the *Division of Term*.

own stove, fish, a joint and a pudding while the soup was being consumed.

Entertainment is, on the whole, simpler today, with sherry parties, coffee parties, wine and cheese parties or merely drinking in a public house replacing the formal four-course meal. The even more elaborate *Gaudies*¹ and *Spreads*² of the last century have vanished, to the financial loss of many local tradesmen. Cambridge grocers and wine merchants still speak nostalgically of the days when undergraduates had money to spend and so were valued customers. Until well into the 1930s, on the other hand, local housewives complained bitterly, on occasions, that they had to watch an undergraduate being served out of his turn in a grocer's shop while they, who bought there regularly for fifty-two weeks of the year, had to stand and wait.

In his work the undergraduate now has the advantage of individual tuition through Supervisions provided as a normal part of his University course. He is not forced, therefore, as was his predecessor, to engage a private tutor or coach. The latter, generally a man without an Honours Degree himself, was often resorted to by despairing undergraduates who, a few weeks before their final examinations, suddenly realised that they had done very little work and so had to cram into their heads as much information as they could in the shortest possible time. The coach was, indeed, often referred to as a *Crammer*.

The fees of a private tutor in the 1850s were £14 a term for an hour's tuition daily, Noblemen and Fellow Commoners being charged more and Sizars about half this sum. Each Tutor took from five to six pupils a day. The engagement of private tutors became a matter of some concern to the University and to the College Tutors,³ and in 1781 it was forbidden to undergraduates to have such help for two years before their final examination. This period was, however, shortened to six months in 1824 and was even then found impossible to enforce.

The tradition of a leisured privileged class coming up to the University to spend three years in idleness and pleasure has almost disappeared. There are few undergraduates today who will not have to earn a living and in a fiercely competitive world a degree is a useful if not an essential advantage. But even though there were in

¹ *Gaudies*: certain elegant 'set-outs' when men in their own rooms enjoy the *otium cum dignitate* like hearty good fellows, there being on such occasions no lack of solids, or hock, claret and champagne. *Grad. ad Cantabridg.*, ed. 1828.

² *Spread*: a feast of more humble description than a gaudy and generally consisting of cold fowls, sauce, etc. *op. cit.*

³ There were not enough Tutors to meet the needs of the Colleges.

the past many men who had little need, desire or even ability to study, there were always those both able and eager to obtain a degree. The distinction between the two became a matter of tradition.

The *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam*, for example, makes clear the difference between the idler—the *Varmint Man*¹ and the studious *Reading Man*. The Varmint way of reading for a degree was to

Cut Lectures, go to Chapel as little as possible, dine in hall seldom once a week, give Gaudies and Spreads, keep a horse or two, go to New-market . . . be . . . a staunch admirer of the bottle and care a damn for no man.

The Reading Man, on the other hand,

attends lectures regularly, never misses chapel, dines nearly always in hall, takes moderate exercise, is rarely out of College after the gates are shut, reads twelve hours a day . . . and goes quietly to bed.

Charles Bristed² distinguished between the *Reading Man* and the *Rowing Man* (the *ow* as in *now*), who was, in the 1850s and 1860s, the equivalent of the Varmint Man in that he had money, spent it on dress, entertainment and wine and did little serious work.

With the development of sports in the University came the man whose aim was less to obtain a degree than a Blue, or who was content to achieve a third-class degree provided he distinguished himself at rowing or on the football field. To some extent he has not entirely vanished from the University scene if the *Varsity Handbook*³ of 1965 is to be believed:

A Blue is becoming a specialist occupation and thus its prestige has declined very little from the days when it was only necessary to sport a Hawks Club⁴ tie to get any job going.

Undergraduate Clubs

The modern Freshman coming up to the University is now faced with so wide a variety of Clubs which he can join that it has become the custom in recent years to hold, on two days early in the Michaelmas

¹ *Varmint* had belonged originally to sporting slang and denoted a clever amateur—hence *smart*, *dashing*, and thus in University parlance a swell, a man of fashion. Marples: *Dict. of Univ. Slang*, 1950, p. 136.

² *Five Years in an English University*, 1852.

³ Published at the beginning of each academic year by the undergraduate weekly newspaper *Varsity*.

⁴ An exclusive sports club.

Term, a *Societies Fair*. At this all the Clubs have stands exhibiting their various aims and activities. No taste is left uncatered for. There are Discussion Groups, Faculty Societies, Hobbies Societies, Social Societies of all kinds and, of course, the various Sports Clubs. From the end of the last century College *Amalgamated Clubs*, usually called *Amal. Clubs*, have been formed in the interests of the men's pockets. By payment of the membership fee of these, included in each man's terminal bill, undergraduates are entitled to membership of all the College Clubs without a further subscription.¹

There are, however, other and sometimes unusual Clubs he may wish to join. He can, for example, become a member of the *Damper Club*, whose chief function is an annual punt race against Oxford in May Week, if during his residence at the University he has unwillingly fallen into the river. He may, perhaps, decide to become a member of the *Society for the Reform of May Week*, whose aims are 'to re-name May Week as June Week and put it in April to relieve the tedium before the Tripos Examinations'.

A Jesus College man will find *The Natives*, a Club founded in 1877 through the chance gift of a barrel of oysters to one of its original members who invited his friends to share the delicacies.

At Trinity Hall is the *Asparagus Club* founded in 1931. The College is noted for the number of its members who read Law, and it so happened that one of these was consulted by the College chef on some personal matter. As an expression of his gratitude for the advice he received, the chef not infrequently sent up special delicacies to the rooms of his 'legal adviser', who shared the food with his friends. One evening some asparagus was sent up and was so much enjoyed that it was decided to repeat the feast a few days later, and in this way the Club came into being.

The meetings are known as *Eatings* and take place two or three times a term. The first piece of asparagus must be eaten by the Head Chef, an elected officer, who must be wearing a chef's white cap and coat with the Club crest on the cap and breast pocket.

Dining Clubs have long flourished, some for many years, others only for a brief period. Several, composed of members with some common interest, still exist. Among the best known of the older ones was the *Beef Steak Club* founded in the mid-eighteenth century. In the early days of its existence the diners wore at their meetings blue coats and buff waistcoats with the letters B.S. on the buttons, black trousers and white cravats fastened with a pin in the form of a bull's head.

¹ An additional subscription may be required by the College Boat Club.

In 1764 was founded the *True Blue Club*, its membership then limited to three Noblemen, three Fellow Commoners and three Pensioners. Their dress consisted of blue coats lined with buff silk and fastened by yellow buttons engraved with T.B.; buff waistcoats with blue linings, black silk breeches and white silk stockings. Dress wigs had to be worn.

In c. 1902 came into being, until the late 1950s, the *Pagans' Cricket Club* formed 'in admiration of cricket on the village green and in opposition to those in the University who take sport, and especially cricket, seriously'. The Club had no Captain, President, Secretary or Committee, only a 'leader in the field'—who might be a Don—and who took the place of captain at each match. The batting order of the team was decided by the drawing of playing cards—Ace to Knave—the man who drew the Knave having to keep wicket. It was a rule that Pagans should never win a match, but should aim at a tie. In 1950 they did, in fact, defeat the University Women's Cricket Club by four runs, but the ladies' team was induced to sign a document stating that the last four runs of the Pagans' innings had been scored from the seventh ball of an over, a breach of rule which a shy umpire had been too frightened to report earlier.

A horse-drawn carriage used to take the Pagans to their matches against village teams; the players wore top-hats and nineteenth-century dress and although a score book was later introduced to replace the traditional notching of a piece of willow to record runs, this was considered by many members to be a regrettable innovation.

Women in the University

The social customs which prevailed in the 1870s, combined with the fact that the arrival of women students in Cambridge was contemplated with horror by an all-male University, led to the imposition of restrictions of which today's residents of Girton, Newnham and the recently founded New Hall are free. The first University women could not afford, in view of the masculine opposition which they faced, to incur the slightest breath of scandal, and circumspection was required of them even more, perhaps, than it was of their contemporaries whose lives followed a more traditional pattern.

At lectures, at supervisions, when these were given by men, and at examinations when they came into contact with male undergraduates, the women had to be chaperoned. On the few occasions that they were allowed to entertain a man in the College—and he had to be a

very close relative—they had to remain standing and the door had to be kept open. Girton students when they had to attend lectures outside the College were driven to them in cabs ‘with four melancholy students in each; while the drab Newnham girls skurried to and from their lectures on foot’.¹

Since 1947 women have been admitted to full membership of the University and its degrees and can enjoy the same academic and social life as the men. Even the last of the all-male strongholds—the Union Debating Society—has been stormed; not only can women now join the Society but in 1967 one was elected its President.

The ‘small tea, coffee or cocoa parties . . . to which individual students invite their friends in the evening . . . and (which) take the place of the “wine” to which the grosser male undergraduate is addicted’,² reflect the picture of the ‘fair undergraduette’ for long held to be a true portrait of the University woman. Certainly the days are gone when it was the custom for ‘charades and Shakespeare readings’³ to provide the evening’s entertainment after dinner at 6.30, after which hour women students were not allowed, without permission, to leave their Colleges.

Prejudice against women in the University took long to disappear, however, and even ‘as late as the 1930s there were still male university lecturers who took pleasure in driving women students from the lecture rooms by, to say the least, ungallant language and allusions’.⁴ Even today their presence in the City is largely unnoticed, outnumbered as they seem to be by the numerous, and far more conspicuous and vocal foreigners who attend the many English Language Schools which since 1948 have been established in Cambridge.

Miscellaneous Customs

*The Assize Judge*⁵

By long-established custom the Judge of the Quarterly Assize stays, when in Cambridge, in the Master’s Lodge of Trinity College. He brings with him his own cook and butler and his own supply of cutlery, crockery, bed linen, etc. No charge is made on the Treasury for his accommodation. Plate 61 shows Mr Justice Swift leaving Trinity College in 1924 *en route* for the University Church. He is preceded by the High Sheriff, the Sheriff’s Chaplain, the Under

¹ Gwen Raverat: *Period Piece*, 1952, p. 45.

² A former Girton student in the *Graphic*, 1874.

³ *Strand Magazine*, 1894.

⁴ B. J. White: *Cambridge Life*, 1960, p. 233.

⁵ See also Appendix I: *Customs of Municipal Life*.

Sheriff, a footman and two trumpeters of whom one was a well-known Cambridge chimney sweep. The Judge's Marshal walks last in the procession.

On arrival at the Lodge the Judge is offered mulled port and biscuits; he also receives from the College a gift of port, but not, in modern times, the twelve pairs of gloves once presented to him by the Vice-Chancellor.

Although the practice of ringing the bells of the University Church to welcome the Judge on his arrival in Cambridge ceased early in this century, an Assize Sermon is still preached in St Mary's at about half-past ten on the first day of the Assizes. In the past this short service was at a much earlier hour.

Bicycles

Bicycling as a sport became popular with undergraduates in the 1880s, in which period a Bicycle Club was founded and a riding path provided for its members in a field along the Backs of the Colleges. In this century the bicycle has become the universal means of transport and because Cambridge is flat and many of its residents also are cyclists, the addition during University terms of several thousand undergraduates' machines presents a great traffic problem in the narrow streets. Machines are propped up, one on top of the other, against every available wall and railing or left leaning perilously in the gutters, where they are likely to be grazed by passing cars or knocked over by pedestrians. On windy days bicycles frequently crash over on to the pavements, scattering the contents of their baskets under the feet of passers-by.

Bicycle sheds have been provided in the Colleges from the 1890s and in this century these have been greatly extended and an attendant, often known as the Bicycle Man, appointed to supervise them.

Bicycles left unchained outside lecture rooms, sports grounds and in the City are not infrequently 'borrowed'. It is now the custom for undergraduates to register their machines with the bicycle attendant, who paints on the mudguard the registration number as a means of identification.

Carpet Beating

Until the 1920s it was a common sight in August and September to see porters carrying carpets from College rooms to Coe Fen, Laundress Green¹ or Jesus Green in order to clean them by beating

¹ At the corner of Silver Street and Queen's Road. So called because it was one of the open spaces used by washerwomen for drying.

them with long-handled wicker carpet beaters. The clouds of dust which swirled in the air during the operations prohibited the beating being done in College courts. Some labour-saving domestic equipment was, however, in use in some Colleges early in the century. A Harvey Vacuum Cleaner, patented in 1908, for example, was purchased in that year for use in Caius College; it has now been given to the Cambridge Folk Museum.

College Stamps

The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge for long enjoyed certain privileges in connection with the carrying of letters. Both could employ their own letter-carriers. There were eleven of these in Cambridge in the eighteenth century, five of them going to London and one to each of the towns of Bury St Edmunds, Norwich, Northampton, Kettering, Downham Market and King's Lynn. It was also the custom for Colleges to employ a Messenger to deliver College letters to all parts of the town, the sender initialling them and paying for the service either weekly or in a lump sum at the end of each term.

In 1870 Keble College, Oxford, was founded and began to issue adhesive stamps for franking the local correspondence of its members. Other Oxford Colleges followed suit, but it was not until twelve years later that the system was adopted in Cambridge. When the foundation of Selwyn College was proposed in 1882 the Master-Elect explained in a circular to members of the Senate that 'to further the encouragement of economy and simple living' special College stamps would be issued for placing on all letters delivered by the College Messenger. The following year Queens' and St John's also began to issue stamps.

In 1885, however, the Postmaster-General protested against the special boxes which were provided for the deposit of College letters, against the payment for each letter going to the College and not to the Messenger, and above all against the use of stamps to show that this payment had been made.

A joint committee of College Bursars of Oxford and Cambridge met and agreed to give up the use of stamps and of the special letter boxes and to send by post those letters which would reach their destination more quickly than by means of the College Messengers. They were also prepared to arrange for each Messenger to be paid for each letter which he delivered instead of giving him a fixed annual wage. The Postmaster-General refused to accept these decisions and ordered that, from the end of the Lent Term in Cambridge and the

corresponding Hilary Term in Oxford, 1886, all letters should be sent by post.

W. P. Spalding of Cambridge printed the stamps of the three Colleges which issued them. Those of Selwyn bore the College arms on a shield with a foliated label at the foot inscribed SELWYN COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, in black on a pink background. The printer cut the sheets, each of 480 imperforate stamps, into single stamps.

Queens' College stamps were bright green with a boar's head upon a cross and pastoral staff crossed in a rounded label, with QUEENS' COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE in a band above and below. Those of St John's bore the St John's Eagle above a ribbon label inscribed ST JOHN'S COLL. MESSENGER; lithographed in scarlet on white paper, these stamps, and those of Queens', were perforated.

Users of the stamps bought them for $\frac{1}{2}d.$ each (at St John's a dozen cost 5*d.*); cancellation was the duty of the College Porter before he handed the letter to the Messenger, but this was not always carried out. In Cambridge the cancellation was usually made by a cross in ink or pencil on the stamps.

Today the Colleges still employ inter-College messengers whose duty it is to deliver letters within a small area of Cambridge. At St John's this service is known as the Pigeon Post.

*Discommuning*¹

The University still retains its ancient right of discommuning, which is designed to save an undergraduate from the consequences of incurring debts, spending too freely on entertainment or making hire-purchase agreements which later prove too costly to keep. Thus, a tradesman is in danger of being discommuned, that is of losing his privilege to deal with undergraduates, if he permits any of the last-named to enter into a hire-purchase agreement, without the written consent of his Tutor, in which the sum to be paid by instalments exceeds £20; even in cases when the instalments are less than £20 details of the agreement must be sent to the Tutor before any contract is signed.

Should an undergraduate, at the end of any term, be in debt to a tradesman to the extent of £20 or more, the tradesman must inform the debtor's Tutor on the last day of term or be liable to be

¹ *Discommon*: at Ox. and Camb., to deprive (a tradesman) of the privilege of dealing with undergraduates. *Discommune*: to cut off from a community or fellowship. *O.E.D.* The second spelling is used at Cambridge.

discommuned. He must also send in on September 1st a statement of any debts exceeding £20 still unpaid on that date. Under the same liability of being discommuned, no tradesman or any other person may lend or procure a loan for any undergraduate, nor may an hotel or restaurant proprietor allow any party at which food and drink are served and at which more than fifteen undergraduates are present, to be held on his premises without written permission from the Junior Proctor.

Until the 1870s keepers of billiard rooms were discommuned for allowing students to play on their premises. In this century garage-owners, aeroplane- and car-hire firms can be discommuned for hiring motor vehicles and aircraft to undergraduates without permission from the special Pro-Proctor having first been obtained. If such permission is granted, the hirer and the vehicle must be covered by an accident insurance policy which includes third-party risks. No one may garage a car for an undergraduate unless he has first given the full details of the car, together with the name of the owner, to the Pro-Proctor. Boat proprietors can be discommuned for permitting disorderly or immoral conduct by undergraduates on their boats.¹

The King Street Run

Of recent years has become established the custom of holding, early in each academic year, the 'King Street Run', in which the participants must drink a pint of beer in each of the five² public houses in King Street in the shortest possible time and without losing any.

Reading Parties

Today many undergraduates cheerfully work as bus conductors, railway porters or restaurant kitchen hands during the Long Vacation in order to supplement their grants. Others, with the help of travel grants, join expeditions to all parts of the world for the purposes of study or research. Their predecessors, until early in this century, might have joined a Long Vacation Reading Party.

It was the custom for College Tutors to rent a furnished house in the country or by the sea, either in England or on the Continent, and to take with them a number of undergraduates to work under their

¹ Tradesmen are kept informed by the University of discommuning regulations.

² There are six public houses in the street, but since *c.* 1965 the landlord of the Cambridge Arms at which the Run terminated has banned competitors from entering.

supervision. Fishing, country walks, riding and other relaxations filled part of each day and in this way the men could combine a holiday with their studies, while the Tutor was able to supplement his income by the charges he made for board, lodging and tuition.

Sometimes a man who had himself only recently graduated would arrange a party, but, as Charles Bristed¹ found, this was not always satisfactory, because such a man had little teaching experience. Bristed, moreover, thought it difficult to combine work and amusement. 'It is not impossible to read on a reading party; there is only a great chance against your being able to do so.' Perhaps it was such a reading party that J. L. Roget had in mind when he made his sketch for the *Cambridge Scrapbook* which is reproduced on the left of Plate 62.

Riding the Stang or Stanging

Until the first few years of this century the passage in St John's College leading from the Hall screens to the kitchen, with the Buttery on one side of it and the pantry on the other, was known as *The Staincoat* or *The Stankard*.

It appears that in times past a pole was kept, probably for carrying casks of beer, but on which undergraduates seem also to have hoisted those of their number, or even servants, who had offended against the rules and customs of the College. This pole was called the Stang and the place or passage in which it was kept the Stangate Hole.²

References to a Stangate Hole, Stangate Hall, Staincoat Hole and Staincoat Passage are found in the accounts of Trinity College, Queens' College and Christ's College. Dr Parne, who lived in Trinity from 1714 to 1749, described³ the use of the stang in that College during the Christmas revels:

. . . ye fellows dined and supped promiscuously with ye scholars. They had a Pole or Colestaff,⁴ which they called ye Stang, on which servants and Scholars were carried by way of Punishment, the latter chiefly for missing Chapel. Stangate Hole was ye Place where this instrument of discipline used to be deposited.

This use of the stang at Christmas is again recorded by John Ray:⁵

Stang: This Word is still used in some Colleges in the University of

¹ *Five Years in an English University*, 1852.

² R. F. Scott: *History of St John's College*, 1907, p. 4.

³ In MSS. preserved in the College.

⁴ *Colestaff*: var. of *Cowlstaff*: a stout stick used to carry a cowl (i.e. a tub, cask, vat), being thrust through the two handles of it; a stang. *O.E.D.*

⁵ *A Collection of English Words not generally used* . . . ed. 1768, p. 57.

Cambridge; to *stang* Scholars in *Christmas* time, being to cause them to ride on a Colt-staff, or Pole, for missing of Chapel.

Roof Climbing

Ever since the first Colleges were built it is probable that undergraduates without late passes have found ways and means of getting into them after the gates have been closed at night. Usually walls have to be climbed despite the iron spikes or pieces of glass affixed to the tops to prevent just such action. From the 1870s, however, more adventurous climbing has from time to time been carried out over the roofs of Colleges, the Senate House and other buildings, usually during the nights of May Week or at the end of the Easter Term.

These climbs are highly organised, indeed 'guides' to the roofs of St John's and Trinity have been published giving details of routes, heights, distances and the time which should be allowed to get from one point to another. Visible proof of a successful climb is generally left behind in the form of a flag, a garment or, more commonly before 1939 than now, a chamber pot placed on a pinnacle or a statue.

To undertake a climb entails the risk not only of injury, or even death, but also the jeopardising of a man's career. The University authorities naturally take an unfavourable view of such exploits and an undergraduate can be sent down from the University for making a roof climb after he has already been warned after a previous venture.

Damage can also be caused to the fabric of the Colleges by such climbs, and repairs to ancient and crumbling stonework can be costly. King's College Chapel, which has always attracted a large number of climbers, has suffered a great deal in this respect and recently a fragment of the great East window was broken. It was, however, a night climber who, a few years ago, was able to give timely warning of the unsafe condition of some of the pinnacles on the Chapel.

Smoking

That the habit of smoking had spread to the University in the seventeenth century is known from the decree made in 1615 forbidding graduates and undergraduates to resort to any 'Inn, Tavane, Alehowse or Tobacco Shop'¹ during the visit of James I to Cambridge in that year. An insight into the custom of the time is provided in the remainder of the decree, which ordered that no member of the University was to presume to 'take tobacco in St Marie's Church or

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, III, 68.

in Trinity College Hall'. Stems and bowls of seventeenth-century clay pipes are still occasionally dug up in College grounds.

In the eighteenth century the long-stemmed churchwarden pipe was, if contemporary prints are to be believed, popular with both senior and junior members of the University. Von Uffenbach, visiting Cambridge in 1710, describes¹ being taken to the Greek's Coffee House, where 'you meet the chief professors and doctors who read the papers over a cup of tea and a pipe of tobacco', and to the Music Club at Christ's College. Here he listened to the weekly concert given by Bachelors, Masters and Doctors of Music which lasted until eleven o'clock in the evening; 'there was besides smoking and drinking of wine . . .' Emmanuel College seems to have had its famous smokers in this century: Dr Farmer, who is referred to in the *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam* as having 'distinguished himself for his taste for tobacco', and Dr Samuel Parr, of whom there is a well-known engraving which shows him smoking in the pulpit.

Smoking seems to have declined at the end of the century. Gunning wrote in his *Reminiscences* in 1786 that it was 'going out of fashion except for short pipes on the river in the evening'. Professor Pryme,² recalling his undergraduate days in 1800, said that 'it had no favour with us undergraduates' and that it was only allowed in Trinity Combination Room at Christmas. It had been the custom to allow smoking in both the Large and Small Combination Rooms in the College on All Saints Day and on the Feast of the Purification, as well as at Christmas and sometimes on November 5th. Dr Whewell, when Master of Trinity, was much opposed to this custom, especially since Fellow Commoners were admitted to the Combination Rooms and smoking was a bad example to them. Undergraduates were officially forbidden to smoke in the College Courts—a rule only recently relaxed in some Colleges—or when in academical dress.

The smoking of pipes and cigars revived in the nineteenth century. In 1835 Charles Stuart Calverley came up to Christ's College. Among the light verses which he wrote is his well-known *Ode to Tobacco*, a copy of which is engraved on a bronze plaque on the wall of Bacon Brothers, the tobacconists' firm established on Market Hill in Cambridge in 1805 and from which Calverley purchased his supplies. Indeed, the firm claims that it was 'largely through Bacon and his illustrious customer that the struggle for the recognition of tobacco was given a decisive turn'.

¹ Diary of Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, quoted in *Cambridge under Queen Anne*, ed. J. E. B. Mayor, 1911, pp. 132–3.

² *Autobiographical Recollections*, 1870.

The 'Ode to Tobacco'

Thou who, when fears attack,
Bid them avaunt, and Black
Care, at the horseman's back
 Perching, unseatest;
Sweet when the morn is grey;
Sweet when they've cleared away
Lunch; and at close of day
 Possibly sweetest;

I have a liking old
For thee, though manifold
Stories, I know, are told,
 Not to thy credit;
How one (or two at most)
Drops make a cat a ghost—
Useless, except to roast—
 Doctors have said it;

How they who use fusees
All grow by slow degrees
Brainless as chimpanzees.
 Meagre as lizards;
Go mad and beat their wives;
Plunge (after shocking lives)
Razors and carving knives
 Into their gizzards.

Confound such knavish tricks.
Yet know I five or six
Smokers who freely mix
 Sill with their neighbours;
Jones—(who, I'm glad to say,
Asked leave of Mrs J—)
Daily absorbs a clay
 After his labours.

Cats may have had their goose
Cooked by tobacco juice;
Still, why deny its use
 Thoughtfully taken?
We're not as tabbies are;
Smith, take a fresh cigar!
Jones, the tobacco jar!

HERE'S TO THEE, BACON.

Charles Bristed, writing of the average undergraduate of the early 1850s says that 'He often starts himself for his morning's work with the stimulus of a cigar'. Certainly the number of tobacconists in Cambridge steadily increased from the 1860s.

But there was some opposition to smoking in that period, and opposition to the opposers. In November 1854 a Thomas Reynolds of London came to deliver a lecture against tobacco. Large crowds of undergraduates went to the Guildhall to hear him, but as soon as the lecture began they all lit up pipes and cigars and shouted abusive remarks which so enraged the lecturer that he became equally abusive. The police had finally to clear the hall and next day two Johnians were fined £5 each for assaulting a constable.

Meerschaum¹ pipes were fashionable in the later nineteenth century, their owners polishing them with loving care until the original pale colour deepened to a rich golden brown. But smoking was not encouraged, nor was it introduced into Combination Rooms until the late 1880s—in 1889 in St John's, for example.

In the early years of the present century the cigarette gained favour; undergraduates purchased them by the hundred more commonly than in packets of ten or twenty. Pipe-smoking continued, however, many local tobacconists selling their own specially compounded blends. The connoisseur of cigarettes could buy hand-rolled ones and even see them being made. In S. P. Ora's shop on Market Hill a young woman used to sit deftly rolling cigarettes in full view of the public, who used to stand and admire her dexterity as the pile of completed cigarettes mounted higher and higher.

Trinity College Customs

Undergraduates still keep up the custom, established perhaps in the eighteenth century, of trying to run round the Great Court of Trinity College while the College clock is striking twelve, traditionally twelve midnight. The complete distance is 383 yards, and the clock takes 43 seconds to strike, so the feat, if accomplished, is no mean one.

The clock, on the north tower of the Court, was installed during the Mastership of Dr Bentley (1700–42). Its unusual method of striking was recorded by Wordsworth, who heard it from his rooms in near-by St John's College, in his *Prelude*:

Near me hung Trinity's loquacious clock,
Who never let the quarters, night or day,

¹ *Meerschaum*: 1. A hydrous silicate of magnesium . . . 2. A tobacco pipe with a meerschaum bowl. *O.E.D.*

Slip by him unproclaimed, and told the hours
Twice over, with a male and female voice.

The clock does, in fact, repeat each stroke, first on the largest of the three bells (A flat) and then on the second (E flat). The quarters are struck on the first and second bells (F and E flat). This double striking gave rise to the saying that 'Trinity's clock strikes first for itself and then for St John's'.

A flight of eight stone steps, 15 inches wide and with a rise of 6 inches to each step, leads to the door of the College Hall. It has long been the custom for undergraduates to try to clear the flight in one jump from top to bottom. A more difficult feat, believed to have been accomplished only two or three times, is to clear the steps in a single leap upwards.

Generations of visitors to Trinity have heard of the echo in the north side of the cloisters in Nevile's Court. At one end of the cloister is a door with a massive iron knocker. By stamping hard on the stone flags at the opposite end, near the Library entrance, a sound is produced which is exactly that of a knocker; indeed, the writer well remembers that, as a child, she, as doubtless many others must have been, was convinced that she saw the knocker move. The College authorities have tried to put a stop to the noise, which must be very tiresome to those working near by, of stamping feet and echoing bangs, but have not entirely succeeded in so doing.

Until the end of the last century the *Freshman's Pillar*—a massive stone column at the angle of the cloisters—offered a challenge to first-year men who were dared to go right round the narrow ledge at the top of the base without losing balance and so having to put a foot on the ground.

The Upware Republic

In Upware, a hamlet by the junction of the Burwell Lode with the Cam, stood, until it was burned down a few years ago, an inn known as the Five Miles from Anywhere—No Hurry.¹ This became, in the mid-nineteenth century, a popular resort of undergraduates when they were fishing, skating, rowing or shooting in the neighbourhood or making some botanical or geological expedition in the surrounding Fens. By 1851 a Club, known as the *Upware Republic*, was founded under the leadership of two Consuls assisted by such

¹ Plate 63. The full name of the inn was, by tradition said to be either *The Five Miles from Anywhere—No Hurry so Don't Spill* or . . . *No Hurry, There's Nowhere Else to Go*.

officers as the State Chaplain, the Minister of Education, the Tapster, the Interpreter, the State Fiddler and the Champion.

In 1917 the late Arthur Gray, a Cambridge bookbinder, came into possession of the Visitors' Book of the Republic and included extracts from it in his *Cambridge Revisited* of 1920. Covering the years 1851 to 1856, the Visitors' Book contained the names of many who, undergraduates at that time, were later to become distinguished in many walks of life: Samuel Butler, for example, who was then up at St John's and was to be the author of *Erewhon* and other works; Osbert Salvin and Frederick Goodman, the later celebrated naturalists and joint editors of the *Biologia Centrali-Americana*; a future Master of the Rolls, Sir Archibald Lewin Smith.

Not only were names entered in the book—and it was a strict rule of the Republic that they should be—but members often recorded comments on the boating, shooting, fishing or other activities which had led them to the inn, or on their visits to the village feasts in nearby Wicken and Burwell. The last entry was made on May 18th, 1856, when the Consuls looked forward 'with confidence to the next visitors' book as the mirror of many future happy days at Upware'. Whether such a book was begun, or for how much longer the Republic lasted, is impossible to tell. The whereabouts of the first book are not now known and it is possible that any future ones, if they ever existed, were destroyed or lost; the inn was used to house German prisoners-of-war between 1914 and 1918.

In the 1860s an eccentric character named Richard Ramsay Fielder (1823–86) took up residence at the Five Miles from Anywhere—No Hurry, and proclaimed himself King of Upware. Fielder, an M.A. of Jesus College and a member of Lincoln's Inn, a man of ability and good family, spent his time alternately fighting and drinking with the crews of the barges and lighters on the Cam. Occasionally he wrote and published verses and once prepared a plan for a new tidal sluice on the Ouse. Dressed usually in a scarlet waistcoat and corduroy breeches, he took everywhere with him an enormous earthenware jug, known as His Majesty's Pint, filled with rum punch which he shared with the lightermen. When the river trade declined towards the end of the century he left Upware and retired to live and die in sober respectability in Folkestone.

It may be that Fielder appeared in Upware earlier than the 1860s. One of the entries in the 1851–6 Visitors' Book was made on 1st January 1854 by Edmund George Harvey,¹ who described him-

¹ Of Queens' College. Later Rector of St Mary's, Truro, and Vicar of Mullyon. Composer of Gregorian chants, hymns, etc.

self as 'the quondam Count of Upware and Reach who held sway over these parts prior to the establishment of a Kingdom and after that the Republic . . .' This reference to an earlier Kingdom links with the memories of a subscriber to *Fenland Notes and Queries*¹ who recalled that the Upware inn, having been restored by the landlord, Tom Appleby, about the year 1850, was engaged by two undergraduate societies, *The Idiots* and *The Beersoakers* for the Easter vacation. 'High jinks' were held there—wrestling, sparring, games of all kinds—and there was but one rule, that no one was to say what he meant under pain of forfeiting a quart of ale.

In the evenings the men were joined by inhabitants of Upware, Wicken, Reach and other villages and there was much singing and drinking. The writer, who signs himself 'An Old Idiot', and must presumably have been present at the gathering, further recalls that, since such revels clearly demanded a master, one was found in an undergraduate named Richard Ramsay Fielder, who was unanimously crowned King of Upware. It was, moreover, the writer claims, Fielder who renamed the inn the Five Miles from Anywhere—No Hurry, its official name having been the Lord Nelson, though it would appear that at the time of the landlord's renovation of the premises the sign had been lost.

It may be, then, that Fielder's later reign in the 1860s was but a resumption of his monarchy after the Republic had ceased to exist. That he was King of Upware in 1860 is proved by a printed copy² of two of his *Cambridge Lyrics* (*Farewell the Varsity* and *May Boat Races*). On the fly-leaf, in Fielder's handwriting, is:

John Day Beales.
Companion of Upware.
Feb: 26. 1861.
with the Author's compliments.

On the last page Fielder has written, below his signature:

Rex primus Upware. Jan. 1860

Below this is drawn his crest (an arrowhead) and motto: CELER. ET. ACER., while on the back of the pamphlet, still in Fielder's writing, is:

CHARTE UPWARE
FOEMINA TUTA, DEBITA SOLUTA
FIT LEX IN REGNO MEO.

¹ Vol. II, 21-2.

² This is in St John's College Library.

CELER ET ACER, FIDEI DEFENSOR
SIT REX VOLENTE DEO.

R.R.F.

Upware Constitution:

Pay your way,

And no woman betray,

Is in this little Realm the law.

Smart and quick

And a regular brick

Please God be its King to the core.

1861

R.R.F.

FIVE MILES FROM ANYWHERE

NO HURRY

The contributor to *Fenland Notes and Queries* relates how many of the songs sung by *The Idiots* and *The Beersoakers* were learned from the villagers who came to the inn each evening. One song, he recalls, told of a huge pie into which, when it was opened, ninety men fell and were drowned 'which took away their appetite'. Tom Appleby, the landlord, often sang *Ground for the Flure* (*Floor*) the first verse of which ran:

I have lived in the fens for many long years
With my dog and my gun to drive away cares,
In a neat little cottage, and the roof it is secure,
And look where you will you'll find ground for the flure.
Chorus: Ground for the flu-ure (twice).

The Republic and the Kingdom of Upware are interesting examples of the close association between the University and the Fens which resulted from the custom, continued until the end of the last century, of students exploring the Fens for the purposes of study or sport. By meeting and talking in riverside alehouses both undergraduates and fenmen contributed much to each other. Readers of the collections of *Fen Tales* which W. H. Barrett heard in his youth will recall that several of these stories are based on what the original narrators must have learned from undergraduates. The students, on their part, must surely have learned a great deal about fenland life and traditions.

Wine Licences

Among the privileges long possessed by the University, and which were so often the cause of disputes with the town of Cambridge, were those of licensing alehouses and of granting licences for the sale of wine. By the Cambridge Award Act of 1856 the University lost the right to license alehouses, but retained that of issuing wine licences,

though no charge was, in future, to be made for these. Grocers, chemists and others who sell wines must still obtain such permits from the Vice-Chancellor in addition to those obtained from the Licensing Magistrates. Many grocers' shops display their University Licence, which usually attracts interested comment from visitors to Cambridge.

Plate 64 shows a University Licence issued in 1836 to Messrs Berry & Co. It will be seen that it had to be renewed annually, which is not now necessary, and that the sum of £10 had to be paid to the Vice-Chancellor. This was the charge abolished by the Act of 1856. More modern licences merely declare the holder to be 'one of the Vintners' of the University and so able, 'Himself or his Servants, in the house in which he now dwelleth, or on the premises thereunto belonging, situate and being within the said Town and University of Cambridge and the Precincts thereof, to utter, sell, and retail, Foreign Wine of all sorts whatsoever'. The Vice-Chancellor's seal is affixed to all the licences.

9

Customs of Municipal and Corporate Life

The customs centred round mayoral and civic procedure were once numerous and intricate. Some have disappeared, or been simplified in modern times, while of recent years there have been from time to time suggestions made for the abolition of certain long-established practices such as, for example, the wearing of gowns by members of the Corporation of Cambridge at meetings of the City Council.¹

It was in 1558 that the Corporation ordered Aldermen to wear 'murrey² gowns and tippetts, or forfeit 10s. a quarter'.³ Two years later it was ordained that every Alderman who had filled the office of Mayor should, 'against Christmas next', buy a scarlet gown for his wife. Every future Mayor was to do the same, the fine for non-obedience being £10, of which half would be put in the Poor's Box and the remainder used for the needs of the town and the Mayor. These gowns were to be worn at Christmas, Easter, Whitsun, Michaelmas and at meetings of the Gild of Merchants under pain of a fine of 20s.⁴

The Mayor had his own scarlet gown for wear on Common Days.⁵

¹ Certain members do refuse to wear gowns. The general public, too, are sometimes heard to deride municipal traditions as expressed in ceremonial processions, the carrying of maces, etc.

² *Murrey*: (of) the colour of the mulberry; purple-red; also, the cloth of this colour. *O.E.D.*

³ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 147. ⁴ *op. cit.*, II, 162.

⁵ Common Days were: Michaelmas Day, the Tuesday after Twelfth Day, Hock Tuesday (*b. below*), the day following the election of the Mayor and Bailiffs and St Bartholomew's Day.

Hock Tuesday or Hock-day: The second Tuesday after Easter Sunday (or, according to some, Easter Week). *O.E.D.*

In 1575 the Corporation ordered that he was to wear the gown on the days of Christmas, Easter, Whitsun and Michaelmas and that on these *Scarlet Days* all the Aldermen were to wear scarlet gowns, except that on Michaelmas Day those who had not been Mayors need only wear their murrey gowns. The Mayor was given, at the same time, the power to order the Aldermen to wear scarlet or murrey on any specific occasion at his discretion, a fine of half a mark—3s. 4d. to be imposed for disobedience. Every Alderman, too, was to have one servant at least waiting on him 'to and from the chirche or other place where he shall goe in that apparell'.¹

In 1588 the two Treasurers of the town, together with those who had been elected to fill the office in previous years, were ordered to come into 'ye guilde hall of this Towne . . . apparelled in his gowne and cap' on pain of the forfeiture of 3s. 4d.²

It seems that by 1613 the members of the Council must have become lax in their observance of the custom of wearing wide-sleeved gowns, for in that year they were again ordered to do so on the threat that if they did not then they would be allowed no voice at the meetings.³

Two years later, a few days before James I visited Cambridge on March 5th, the Corporation made yet another order regarding the apparel that must be worn by the Aldermen, Common Councillors and other officials on that occasion. The aim was to 'enduce all persons within the precincts of this incorporacion to decentsie & conformitie'. The Aldermen were to wear their scarlet gowns and velvet tippets, the Common Councillors and those who had been Town Treasurers black suits, burgess gowns, caps and hoods; the Bailiffs their murrey gowns and caps. The Mayor was to be attended by two footmen 'with Jacketts & other necessarie attire'.⁴

The Bailiffs, four in number, are historically the oldest of the officials of Cambridge, being initially appointed in the twelfth century to be responsible, on the burgesses' behalf, for finding the rent or farm of the town due to the king. Until 1833 the official title of the Corporation was 'The Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses', but the Bailiffs' functions diminished in Tudor times, while Aldermen, whose office was created in 1286, became increasingly important. Today the City Bailiffs' duties are nominal. In civic processions they precede the Mayor.⁵

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 342.

² *op. cit.*, II, 460.

³ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, III, 61-2.

⁴ *op. cit.*, III, 67.

⁵ Plate 65. Two bailiffs are seen on this photograph taken in 1945. They are walking immediately in front of the Sergeant who bears the Great Mace before the Mayor.

In addition to finding money towards the payment of the farm or rent of the town, the Bailiffs, with the Mayor, were responsible for the management of the King's Mill at Newnham and were allowed, by a royal writ of 1392, to raise money from the burgesses for this. Each Bailiff had responsibility for one Ward in the town—Bridge Ward, Market Ward, High Ward and Mill Ward—and for the collection of fines, rents, tolls, etc. At Stourbridge Fair time they were required to be on duty at five o'clock in the morning each 6th September to collect the tolls.

In 1622 the number of Bailiffs was reduced to three and they were ordered to pay, in specified proportions, the sum of £40 to the Town Treasurers 'in consideration of their being freed from the charges of the election supper, the dinner at Midsummer Fair, the dinner at Sturbridge Fair and the sending of cakes into the hall on Bartholomew Day'. Their expenditure on the 'Michaelmas Dinner'—probably hitherto paid for out of any profits from tolls, rents and so on—was restricted to £10 in respect of the Bailiff of Market Ward and £5 from each of the other two Bailiffs.¹

Payments for the hoods worn by the Bailiffs occur in the Town Treasurers' Accounts. In 1558 the Bailiffs were ordered to wear the hoods on Christmas Day, St Stephen's Day, Easter Sunday and the day following and at any other time ordered by the Mayor; a fine of 2s. 6d. was to be imposed for each failure to comply with this rule. The order repealed one made in 1523 by which every Bailiff, under pain of a fine of 10s., was to 'provide and order at his proper costs and charges a hood after and according to the old usage and custom, and to use and wear such hood at any Assembly, Court Day, Common Day and general meetings of the burgesses, and festival days throughout the year'.²

The cost of the Mayor's robes were charged to the Town Accounts, which show that, in the past, fairly considerable sums were regularly expended on them. Today, in the interests of economy, the Mayor's robe is altered each year to fit its new wearer. Aldermen and Councillors provide their own, as they did in the past, when, as now, they often bought second-hand gowns from retiring or deceased members of the Council. When Samuel Newton became an Alderman in 1668 he 'bought of Mrs Sarah Simpson widow her husband's scarlett Gowne' and economically had his Common Councillor's gown refurbished for everyday use as he describes in his diary:³

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 142.

² *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, n. 3.

³ *Diary of Ald. Newton*, ed. J. E. Foster, 1890, p. 29.

. . . paid Mr Legg for 17 yards of Lace for it at 1^s 6^d per yard 1¹¹: 5^s: 6^d for silke 3^s: 6^d for facing the sleeves 1^s: and for altering and setting on the tufts 10^s I paid alsoe to M^{rs} Scott for 1¹¹ and a halfe and 3 ounces of Naples Throse¹ silke for the Tufts and making the Tufts accounting the silke at 1¹¹ 7^s per li. (pound) 2¹¹: 9^s: soe the whole charge of altering my gowne stood me in 4¹¹ 9^s 0^d. . . .

Today Aldermen wear black gowns at ordinary Council meetings, while on *Scarlet Days*—the meetings of the Council in May, July, November or December, and March—and on ceremonial occasions they wear their scarlet gowns and the Councillors their black ones.

Until 1507 the Mayors of Cambridge were elected annually on September 9th, but in that year the date was changed to August 16th, at which it remained until 1835. The reason for the change was that, as Stourbridge Fair began on September 9th it was 'the busy time of all the burgesses'.² His election, from 1554, was to be marked by a dinner, according to an agreement made by the Common Councillors on August 24th of that year that 'after the eleccion chosen, Mr Maior & his assystents shall go to some Taverne or other vytalinge house: And the said Maior shall send thyther two dysshes of meat, and every Alderman his disshe of meat or xij^d in money: And that the Maior and Baylyffes newe elect shall paie yerely xx^s and not above . . .'.³

By Alderman Newton's day each new Mayor had adopted the custom of providing cakes and wine at his own house on the day of his election. On Michaelmas Day, when he took his oath as Mayor and Justice of the Peace, the whole Council dined together in the Guildhall and then the new Mayor invited the Alderman and Common Councillors to his house for wine, rolls and sugar cakes, the entertainment being followed by a similar one at the home of the outgoing Mayor.

Protocol, it seems, had to be observed at the Michaelmas dinner. Alderman Newton tells us, in 1668, that 'what doctors were there satt at the upper end next the old and new Mayor, all others of low degree below the Aldermen'. In these seating arrangements the diners were doubtless obeying the order, entered in the Corporation's Common Day book under the date 24th August 1662 that care was to be taken that 'all persons doe sit according to their quality', anyone presuming

¹ This appears to be a mis-reading of *Throne* silk. A good deal of silk was imported from Naples in the seventeenth century in either a raw or twisted, *thrown* state. *Thrown* was often spelt *throne* at that date. The reference to making tufts of the silk clearly shows that the material, especially as it was bought by weight, was not a woven silk.

² C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 287.

³ *op. cit.*, II, 92.

to take 'any place where by right he ought not to be' having to pay a fine of 3s. 4d. The dinner, as were other Guildhall feasts, was cooked in the kitchen attached to the hall. The kitchen, which from 1836 was let by the Corporation, survived until c. 1935, being used in its last days as a cabmen's shelter. It was the custom, certainly from the eighteenth century, for a member of the Corporation to be appointed as cook.

The presence of doctors at the Michaelmas dinner, to which Alderman Newton referred in 1668, is explained by the charter of 1316 by which Edward II granted that whenever the Mayor and Bailiffs took their oaths in the Guildhall the Chancellor of the University should be advised of the day. This was so that he, or the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors could be present to receive from the Mayor and Bailiffs, on oath, a pledge that they would maintain the liberties and customs of the University. After the ceremony the Vice-Chancellor and the Proctors were offered wine by the Mayor, while any doctors who had attended dined with the Corporation.

This oath-taking led, on several occasions, to strife between the town and the University, and there are records of Mayors being excommunicated for failing to fulfil their pledge. In 1520, for example, George Foyster was excommunicated and was absolved only after he had, in the presence of a gathering of students and others, offered a candle as a penitent to the Virgin Mary in the chapel of the Augustinian Friars. A public notice of his submission was then nailed to the door of the Schools.¹ Sometimes a Mayor flatly refused to take the oath, while one, having first refused, then took it, but in an irreverent manner with his head covered.

The matter of precedence on public occasions also caused strife. In 1605 the Lord Chancellor wrote to the Vice-Chancellor of the University telling him that whereas it had recently been the custom for the Mayor to take precedence over the Vice-Chancellor, in future, as at Oxford and as it had been the custom 'of ancient time' in Cambridge, the Mayor was to take second place.² This led to somewhat childish incidents such as, in 1611, when the Vice-Chancellor claimed the seat where the Mayor usually sat at the Quarter Sessions. It was finally agreed that, for that day, neither of the dignitaries should occupy the seat, but go 'one on one side and one on the other, and at dinner neither of them sat at the table end, but the Vice-Chancellor on the bench and the Mayor on the form'.³

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 310.

² *op. cit.*, III, 20-1.

³ *op. cit.*, III, 47.

Even the order in which the names of the Mayor and Vice-Chancellor appeared on official documents caused trouble. The executors of Roger Thompson, who in 1642 bequeathed £200 to the Workhouse founded by Thomas Hobson, refused to pay the legacy because the Mayor's name appeared first on the conveyance of the estate which had been purchased with the bequest.¹ This led to Chancery proceedings which ended in favour of the University.

Today more friendly relations exist between the municipal and University authorities. Any problems of precedence are settled by the understanding that the Mayor takes first place in the Guildhall and the Vice-Chancellor at any meetings of town and gown within the University precincts. The presence, too, of University members, some elected by the Colleges others by Grace of the Senate, on the City Council has ended the feuds and quarrels of the past.

Between the people of Cambridge, however, and the senior members of the University resident in the City is a lack of social communication which dates, probably, from very early times, when learning was restricted to the privileged few. Until 1882, when they were allowed to marry, dons had few contacts outside their College walls. After that date they built, bought or rented houses in roads which became almost entirely inhabited by themselves and their colleagues and so formed close little University communities. Many of these houses, now too large in these servantless days, have been converted to flats and University members live in all parts of Cambridge and in close proximity to non-University people. They still tend, however, to lead their separate lives as the citizens of Cambridge lead theirs.

It was about the year 1470 that *Maces*² were first acquired by the Corporation of Cambridge. Four were purchased about that time and were handed to the sergeants in return for a pledge from each of forty pence. By 1654 there must have been a *Great Mace*, for in the Town Treasurers' Accounts of that year a sum of 20s. was entered for 'mending & gilding of the Great Mace', while in the following century 'new making of the Great Mace'³ cost £14. 6s. The ultimate fate of these early maces is not known. The Great Mace at present in use was given to the Corporation in 1710 by Samuel Shephard, jun., one of the Members of Parliament for Cambridge, and the four

¹ *op. cit.*, III, 402.

² *Mace*: A heavy staff or club, either all of metal or metal-headed, often spiked.

. . . 2. A staff of office resembling this borne before certain officials. *O.E.D.*

³ The accession of a new sovereign often entailed the alteration of the royal arms on maces.

smaller maces were presented in 1724 by Thomas Bacon, M.P. All these are shown on Plate 66.

With the Great Mace was given a Mace Rest, unique to Cambridge. The two sides of this are shown on Plate 66. Strengthened at the back by an iron cross secured by rivets, the rest, which is $22\frac{1}{2}$ inches high and $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, bears on the front the royal arms surrounded with the Garter and having helmet, crest, etc. The Mace Rest—known irreverently, from its shape, as the *Frying Pan*—is borne first in civic processions (see Plate 65) by the Sergeant-at-Mace, who is also the City Crier.¹ He wears a red coat, gold-laced tall silk hat and oval silver arm badge. Behind him walk the four sergeants with the smaller maces; then come the Bailiffs followed by the sergeant who carries the Great Mace immediately in front of the Mayor. When the Mayor attends church the Mace Rest is placed in front of his pew and, by means of a wrought-iron ornamental screen, supports the Great Mace. When the Mace lies before the Mayor at Council meetings it is placed on a wooden stand.

William, Earl of Bedford, soon after the Act of 1663 for settling the draining of the Great Level of the Fens, thereafter known as the Bedford Level, presented a Great Mace to the Bedford Level Corporation. This was always placed by the Sergeant-at-Mace on the table immediately before a meeting of the Board; he also carried it at the head of the procession into the Shire Hall at Ely when the Corporation held its public courts in April and at Whitsun. This Mace is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, but the ornate stands on which it rested, of later date than the Mace, are kept in the Cambridge office of the Great Ouse River Authority.

Since 1964 it has been the custom to elect, on their retirement, long-serving Aldermen and Councillors to be *Honorary Members* of the City Council, application for election being made either by the retiring member himself or by another member of the Council on his behalf. To be eligible for election the retiring Alderman or Councillor must have reached the age of 65 and have served for at least fifteen years on the Council, although these years need not have been continuous. Anyone who has served for this period and is forced to retire through ill health before the age of 65 may also be elected. So, too, may an Alderman or Councillor who has been Mayor, but who, after ten years' membership of the Council, has to retire for health reasons.

¹ Though holding the title of Town Crier the Sergeant-at-Mace does not continue the ancient custom of crying the news, etc. His arm badge was formerly worn by Criers who did perform this duty.

Among the privileges enjoyed by the Honorary Members are those of attending Council meetings, of receiving invitations to civic functions, of being addressed as Honorary Alderman or Honorary Councillor, and, on death, of having the flag flown at half mast above the Guildhall. In civic processions the Honorary Aldermen walk, in order of seniority, immediately behind the serving Aldermen; the Honorary Councillors do likewise behind the serving Councillors. There are at present nine Honorary Aldermen and five Honorary Councillors.

Until the abolition, from 1869, of the old office of high constable it was customary for the two holders of this office in Cambridge to stand outside the Mayor's Court, when it was in session, barring the entrance with crossed staves. The wooden staves, almost $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet long and with the royal arms and those of Cambridge and the date of their issue painted on them, were also borne in processions. The upper half of a pair of these staves, dated 1839, can be seen on Plate 68.

The parish constables (it was in 1836 that a police force was first set up in Cambridge) were issued, at the Mayor's expense, with similarly painted but shorter staves. From early in the last century until *c.* 1922 it was the custom for Mayors of Cambridge, at the termination of their year of office, to present truncheons as souvenirs to various officials and friends. These truncheons were of turned wood, varnished and gilded and painted with the royal arms, the arms of Cambridge, the name of the Mayor and the date of his Mayoralty. Three of these souvenirs, of varying sizes, are shown on Plate 68.

Of the obit¹ sermons, which by will of various Aldermen or burgesses of Cambridge were appointed to be preached before the Mayor and Corporation, only four are now delivered: those of Mr Chevin, Mr Alderman Chapman, Mr Alderman Mott and Mr John Crane.

Richard Chevin, in his will dated 20 June 1589, gave a house in St Clement's parish to the Corporation on the condition that £6 of the income thereof be given to the most needy of the townspeople. A sermon was also to be preached on the Sunday before Candlemas Day and on the Sunday before Michaelmas Day. Only one of these, on the first date, is now preached; the Mayor and Corporation attend and the day is declared a Scarlet Day.

Edward Chapman, by his will of 22 May 1668 bequeathed £100

¹ *Obit.* . . . A Yearly (or other) service in commemoration of, or on behalf of the soul of, a deceased person on the anniversary or other mind-day of his death. *Obs.* except *hist.* *O.E.D.*

to the Corporation, the income of which was to be used for the poor, while an annual sermon was to be preached for the benefit of the living. This is delivered on the Sunday before Easter. This day, too, is a Scarlet Day.

Mr Alderman Mott's Sermon, founded in 1762, is preached annually in Holy Trinity Church on a Sunday in May—a Scarlet Day. The sermon directed by the will of Mr John Crane in 1651 to be preached every fifth year is now preached on the third Sunday in October in every fourth year. As at the other sermons, the Aldermen wear scarlet.

Alderman Newton recorded in his diary his attendance at obit sermons which are no longer preached. In 1664, for example, he went to Great St Mary's Church to hear the sermon which, by the will of Alderman John Fanne, who died in 1551, was to be preached before the Mayor and Corporation on the Sunday after All Saints' Day in the parish church of the Mayor. After the sermon sums of money were to be distributed to the poor, to the preacher, to the Town Treasurers who dispensed the charity and to 'the waytes who shall play there'.¹ In 1664 Alderman Newton joined the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors at the Guildhall for the obit collation, which consisted of a sugar cake and a cup of sack for each person present.²

On Sunday, November 8th, 1668, he heard two obit sermons, the date for the preaching of Alderman Fanne's coinciding that year with that of Alderman Foxton, who died in 1589 and whose will directed that a sermon be preached annually before the Mayor and Corporation in Great St Mary's Church on the second Sunday in November. Both sermons were preceded by the customary feast of cakes and wine in the Guildhall.

It is usual for the Mayor and Corporation to attend church at the opening of each civic year. The custom dates from 1571, when it was ordered that on St Michael's Day—which was then the day on which the new Mayor took his oath—'after the breakfast at the house of the mayor-elect . . . (he) and the corporation should go to St Mary's Church to hear a sermon'³ before the oath-taking. In Alderman Newton's day the breakfast consisted of glasses of sack and 'great peaces of cake' followed by beer at the house of the outgoing Mayor.⁴

¹ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 59.

² *Diary of Ald. Newton*, ed. J. E. Foster, 1890, p. 6.

³ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, II, 239.

⁴ It is now the custom for a dinner to be held in honour of the outgoing Mayor each year. The cost of this is borne by those who attend.

The Alderman's diary throws many sidelights on seventeenth-century municipal customs. On Christmas Eve the Town Treasurers usually presented gifts to the Mayor. Samuel Newton was himself a Treasurer in 1664 and he and his colleague gave that year a sturgeon which cost 1s. More gifts were made by members of the Corporation on New Year's Eve. In 1668 Newton's present of a Westphalia ham and a turkey cost him 16s. 8d., and he remarks rather sourly that the Mayor had not invited any of the Aldermen to his house that day. On Christmas Day it was the custom for the sergeants-at-mace, the town gaoler and their wives to dine with the Mayor.

The Christmas gifts to the Mayor usually took the form of meat, poultry and wine. In 1671, when Newton was Mayor, he wrote out the list of the 'presents sent mee in'; these presents included sturgeon, turkeys, pork, brawn, mutton, veal, candles, a sugar loaf, a whole sheep and no fewer than eighty-nine bottles of claret, forty-six of sack and twelve of other wines. He carefully recorded the name of each donor and noted that 'Alderman Cropley sent noe present'.

In Alderman Newton's day, as now, the Mayor, Bailiffs, Aldermen and Councillors paid a ceremonial visit to the Assize Judge when he came to Cambridge. In the seventeenth century the visit was usually preceded by the drinking of ale at the Mayor's house, where the civic procession assembled before setting out to the Judge's Lodging in Trinity College. Shortly before the Judge's arrival gifts of food were made by the Corporation to his Steward, as Alderman Newton recorded in 1664:

. . . soe soone as wee had informacion by one of the Towne Serjeants that the Judge his Steward was come in (for he comes in a little while before the Judge) M^r Mace and I together with 2 Towne Serjeants . . . went along with the butcher and fishmonger with the Towne present to Trinity Coll: Kitchin where we tarryed a little while, and then came the Judge his Steward, to whome I went with M^r Mace and tould him that M^r Maior and the Aldermen of the Towne presented their service to the Judge and had sent him a present, the particulers of w^{ch} present wee deliuered to the Steward in writing, w^{ch} were, one Veale, one Sheepe, one Pyke, two Duckes, two Eales, and six perches, the veale was prized to us by the butcher at xl^s and the sheepe at xxv^s. The pyke was prized to us . . . at 16^s: the 2 Duckes 6^s the 2 eles 6^s and the perches—, after our message done to the Steward wee tooke our leaues and came away, he tould us he would acquaint his Lord^{sh} with the present: and desired of us to know who were the Towne officers that attended us, wee tould him the 2 Serjeants there, to whome he said there was somewhat to be giuen for their attendance. . . .¹

¹ *Diary of Ald. Newton*, ed. J. E. Foster, 1890, p. 9.

The Corporation's visit to the Judge himself followed that of the Vice-Chancellor, who presented him with a pair of embroidered gloves. After the town officials had taken their leave and were going out through the College gate it was the custom for the Mayor to give a shilling to the College porter.

Seventeenth-century Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors went annually, round about June 16th, to Barnwell Abbey, the home of the Butler family which is now known as Abbey House, where they were entertained to a collation. In 1668 Alderman Newton wrote in his diary:

Tewsdai the Mayor Aldermen and 24^{ty} went to Barnewell Abbey according to custom where they had 4 gamons of Bacon and stewed Pruens, the Towne sent wine, the Mayor onely went in his gowne with the Mace before him, the serjeants overnight went to the 24^{ty} to invite them from the Mayor.¹

This visit may have originated from the obit which Alderman John Keynsham directed, in his will of 1502, should be kept at Barnwell Priory for the repose of his soul and that of his wife, annually on the Monday after the Feast of the Translation of St Thomas the Martyr. On the following day a requiem mass was to be said, immediately after which 'a recreacion, otherwise called a jonckett or banket, to be hadde within the abbey of Bernewell aforesaid, atte cost and charge of the tresorers of the . . . town for the tyme being, atte which to be exspent vj^s. viij^d. in bread, cheese, a hogget² of good ale and another of hostell ale,³ and in payments to the mayor and other officers and alms to the poor people'.⁴

Wisbech was incorporated early in the reign of Edward VI, when the revenues of the Gild of the Holy Trinity were transferred to the burgesses. This Gild, founded in 1379, had among its other activities supported a grammar school for the education of the poor and kept in repair the town's defences against the sea. The burgesses paid to the King the sum of £260. 10s. 10d. for their Charter of Incorporation, which directed that they should annually, on November 2nd or 3rd, elect ten men to administer the business of the town. Very soon these ten men began to elect from their number one man to be their leader who came to be known as the *Town Bailiff*.

Edward VI's Charter was renewed by James I in 1610, from which date the elected ten men were styled *Capital Burgesses* and were chosen

¹ *Diary of Ald. Newton*, ed. J. E. Foster, 1890, p. 27.

² *Hogget*: prob. *Hogshead*: a large cask holding 100 to 140 gallons.

³ *Hostel Ale*: weak ale.

⁴ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 259.

only from those who possessed a freehold worth more than 40s. a year. These Capital Burgesses managed all the donations and bequests for charitable and public purposes, while the Town Bailiff, though he was never officially named in the Charter of Edward or of James, or in the one granted later by Charles II in 1669, had the entire management of the Corporation's affairs. Neither he nor his nine colleagues had any civil authority.

It was the custom, on the day of the election of the Capital Burgesses, to provide cakes, wine and ale for the electing freeholders. As so often happened on such occasions, certain abuses crept in and in 1678 it was ordered that the usual feast should be abandoned because it sometimes produced quarrelling and bad language. But the Wisbech freeholders did not approve of the loss of their annual festivity and it was restored in 1680, although the sum to be spent on it was limited to £8. In 1757 'twenty-five gallons of wine and no more' were ordered to be supplied, but evidently over the following ten years more than this quantity was consumed, or the quarrelling and bad language increased, for in 1767 the Capital Burgesses passed a resolution:

Whereas a custom some years since prevailed in the Corporation of Wisbech St Peter's of giving cakes to such of the burgesses as should attend pursuant to the Charter at the election of capital burgesses, we . . . the capital burgesses having well considered the same agreement and being sensible of the evils thereof, and that the money so spent in cakes may be much better applied and more for the interest of the corporation, hereby promise and agree . . . that we will not upon any account whatsoever revive the custom.

This time their decision was final.

Until 1813 it was customary for the Corporation of Wisbech to present the Bishop of Ely, on his first coming into the town on a visitation, with a purse of gold called *Recognition Money*. In 1676 the Corporation increased the sum 'not doubting but his Lordship will have and continue his favourable kindness to this township and tenants', and payments seem to have been made by instalments of each visit made by a Bishop. Bishop Edmund Keene, in 1775, refused the offering and entered in the Diocesan Records:

The matter relating to the present purse of gold which the corporation of Wisbech St Peter's used to make to the lord bishops of Ely, on their coming to their Town Hall, having been considered by me, and it appearing to have been anciently given by way of recognition money, on the bishop's coming to Wisbech, I thought it proper to give my opinion of the case under my hand, and to signify that as this present was made to me at my primary visitation, I do not expect any such acknowledgement at this or any future time.

Bishop Keene's successor, Dr B. E. Sparke, accepted the gift in 1813, but after that the custom lapsed.¹

In 1835, under the terms of the Parliamentary Bill for the Regulation of Municipal Corporations, the body of Capital Burgesses was dissolved and a governing body composed of a Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors established. The last Town Bailiff, Henry Leach, became the first Mayor.

The Council wear robes only at quarterly meetings, the twenty-four Councillors do not possess robes. The Mace, given to the Corporation in 1908 by Lord Peckover, is carried in civic processions by the *Beadle*, who wears a blue frock-coat trimmed with red, and a tall silk hat. The Corporation attend church on the Sunday following the election of the Mayor, on the first Sunday in the New Year and at a carol service held in the parish church at Christmas.²

On Mayor-making Day sherry is now served in place of the hot rum punch or bishop³ customary in the last century.

Societies for Mutual Help, Social Welfare, etc.

Much of the old public ceremonial of the Friendly Societies in Cambridgeshire has now disappeared. Officers of the various Societies still wear at their meetings their badges of office, but the colourful embroidered banners are no longer carried, as they were until early in this century, in street processions. On such occasions, for example, as the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, the coronation of King Edward VII, the annual corporate church attendance made by members of Friendly Societies, these banners were proudly borne through the streets of Cambridge and the villages. Today the Cambridge Oddfellows attend church or chapel annually, the officials wearing their insignia, but the old ceremonial has gone.

Public houses were the meeting-places of most of the early Friendly Societies and Benefit Clubs⁴ and it was usually at the inn that the annual dinner was held, the members walking in processions with

¹ The above account has been condensed from Neil Walker and Thos. Craddock: *History of Wisbech and the Fens*, 1849.

² Information from Mr G. F. Rowe, for many years Beadle of Wisbech Corporation.

³ *Bishop*: a sweet drink compounded of wine, oranges or lemons, and sugar; mulled and spiced port. *O.E.D.*

⁴ Benefit Clubs, which include public house clubs, are not necessarily registered under the Friendly Societies Acts of 1875 and 1876. Many of the larger ones are.

banners, after a service in the church. A group of members of the Histon Branch of the Shepherds' Club, photographed in *c.* 1880 outside the Bell Inn, is shown on Plate 69. The man in the central foreground is seen holding a large earthenware jug of beer. This jug may well have been one reserved for the use of the Club at its weekly meetings. Certainly several Societies had complete sets of tankards and jugs, inscribed with the name of the branch, and sometimes with the names of each member.¹ Apart from these and, of course, the sashes, etc., worn by officials, the regalia of Cambridgeshire Friendly Societies was meagre in comparison with that of counties to the west of England.²

Disapproval by members of Temperance Societies of the use of public houses as meeting-places led, in Cambridge, to the building in *c.* 1892 of the Friendly Societies' Institute in City Road. Here some of the old banners are preserved. The funds spent on entertainment by Benefit Clubs and the fact that such Clubs, too, met in public houses led to the foundation, in 1841-2, of the Cambridge General Benefit Society. To this Society, in this century, several village Friendly Societies—e.g. the Perseverance Lodge of Ely, the Little Downham Southern Star Shepherds Society, the Wicken Sons of Humanity, transferred the State Insurance side of their affairs.

Before the State assumed responsibility for hospitals, Addenbrook's Hospital Sunday was an important annual event in villages up and down the county as well as in Cambridge. Parades were held, bands played and there was always a church service at which a special Hospital Sermon was preached and a collection taken for the hospital. The Friendly Societies were always much in evidence on these occasions, marching in the processions behind their banners. A photograph taken on Hospital Sunday in Soham in 1907, which shows three of the banners, is reproduced in Plate 70.

The social reform movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to attempts in Cambridgeshire to encourage the poor to co-operative effort to improve both their living standards and their working conditions.

James Hill, a Wisbech banker, was a man of strong principles, eager to assist those less wealthy than himself. A supporter of the campaign to abolish the Corn Laws and a vigorous opponent of the corruption he found in the local government of the town, he founded

¹ The Secretary of the Cambridge Oddfellows has a set of inscribed earthenware tankards and a jug formerly used by members of a now defunct Harston Friendly Society.

² Leamington, for example, has a complete set of regalia made of silver. It is still used on occasions.

a weekly newspaper, *The Star in the East*, in order to spread his views in Wisbech and the neighbourhood. In his articles in the paper he expressed his belief that in education for all lay the remedy for the suffering and even vice which resulted from extreme poverty. He was one of the first people to recognise that very young children needed to be taught by special methods and to put his ideals into practice he built in Wisbech one of the earliest non-sectarian infant schools.

His greatest work was the formation of the Wisbech United Advancement Society, encouraged in this by his friend and adviser, Robert Owen of Lanark,¹ who often visited Wisbech and spoke there at meetings.

The Society² was constituted in 1832 and Hill planned that it should have 400 members, each of whom was to pay 6d. a week. The sum thus obtained was to be spent on the purchase of 10 acres of land so that the members, collectively, might become landowners. The land was to be cultivated and cropped with wheat and potatoes which the members could share equally or buy at a cheap rate. The money raised by the sale was to be put into a general fund and used in part to buy flour, tea and other necessities at wholesale prices direct from the ships bringing them to Wisbech.

By April 1839 the initial sum had been raised and an estate, consisting of arable, grass and orchard, purchased. The members decided that a crop of wheat should be grown, hay should be made from the grass and some cows bought which could feed on the hay in winter. The apples in the orchard were to be sold. Members' children assisted in the cultivation of the wheat land as part of their training in manual labour and it was planned that a festival should be held on Old May Day—May 13th—'to celebrate the redemption of the land by peaceful means into the hands of the rightful owners—the people, the only true lords of the soil'. This festival included a tea in the orchard and a Maypole Dance in the evening in Hill's Infant School.³

The Society, however, failed to live up to Hill's high standards and gradually lapsed. Its promoter complained in his newspaper that members were showing that the wholesale buying of goods appealed to them more than the hard work involved in cultivating the estate, whereas he had intended that the latter should be the main object of the Society. Wisbech tradesmen were not slow to voice their

¹ The eighteenth-century social reformer and originator of the Co-operative movement.

² G. J. Holyoake: *The History of Co-operation*, revised ed. 1906, p. 479, lists the Wisbech Society under the heading *Eccentric and Singular Societies*.

³ *The Star in the East*, 15 May 1839.

disapproval of this purchasing, which robbed them of their trade, and wrote angry letters to the local Press attacking the Society. This led to the resignation of several members and it was agreed that, for a time at least, the wholesale trading should cease.

In 1840, however, Hill's bank failed and he left Wisbech for Epping, where he died in 1856, and with his going the co-operative estate broke up. His efforts to improve the lot of the poor were to be continued by his daughter Octavia, born in Wisbech in 1838, who did so much to abolish the evils of slums in Victorian England and to provide better housing for the needy. James Hill's house on the South Brink in Wisbech bears a plaque to her memory—though it records her only as one of the founders of the National Trust. The name of her father does not appear on it.

A friend of James Hill, William Hodson¹ of Brimstone Hill, Upwell, proposed in 1838 the establishment on 200 acres of land in Manea Fen of a self-supporting Colony in which workers would live in unity and free from the fears of poverty.

In a Manifesto addressed 'To the Working Classes—the Real Producers of Wealth', which appeared in *The Star in the East* of 13th October 1838, he outlined his plans for a community in which there would be 'no distinctions, no individual property' and whose 'motto will be *Each for All*'.

Forty single and ten married men would become the first Colonists, the young men building houses of bricks made by themselves 'as there is good brick earth upon the spot'. When the dwellings were completed the men would be 'at liberty to marry in order to inhabit them'.

The 'selection of the first colony', continued the Manifesto, 'will consist as follows: 25 agricultural labourers and one each of the following trades—baker, miller, butcher, tailor, shoemaker, carpenter, gardener, joiner, cabinet maker, bricklayer, etc.' These were all to be 'not only steady men but the best workmen' and they would be able to 'express their opinions at all times and upon all subjects'.

The *Cambridge Independent Press* of 8th September 1838 carried a report of the proposed Colony 'where the principles and systems of the eccentric but well-meaning Mr Owen of Lanark would be put into effect'. The paper wished success to 'any plans to increase the religious, moral² and industrious habits of the labouring classes',

¹ The usual spelling of his name. G. J. Holyoake in his *History of Co-operation* spells it *Hodgson*.

² G. J. Holyoake (*op. cit.*, p. 182) writes that Owen 'set his face against Hodgson', being influenced against him by local landowners. Holyoake also states that Hodson began his community because 'he heard from clerical adversaries that a community might serve harem as well as public purposes'.

though it doubted whether such plans 'may not prove Utopian while debt, taxation and monopoly stalk through the land'.

Hodson's scheme met, at first, with the approval of the disciples of Robert Owen, who were assured of its excellence by an article in *The New Moral World*¹ of 14th August 1838 contributed by E. T. Craig, who had, presumably, discussed the plans with their originator. Hodson himself wrote to *The New Moral World* in praise of his proposed community, where 'food would be cooked by a special scientific apparatus', members would eat together in a common dining-room and live in houses 'constructed with flues so as to heat them to any required temperature, thus avoiding the labour of fifty fires . . . and removing the possibility of your children being burnt to death'.

By April 1839 the Owenites were disowning Hodson. The involved history² of the disputes does not, however, concern us here, but rather the customs and way of life followed by the members of the Manea Fen Colony, or Cambridgeshire Community No. 1 as it was officially termed. Much information on these can be gathered from the Colony's own weekly newspaper, *The Working Bee*, whose first number appeared on 20th July 1839.

The paper reported, week by week, the progress of the Colony's buildings, which came to include a communal dining-room, dwelling-houses, an observatory with two platforms on which members could take tea; there were brick kilns, and even a short length of railway line leading to them, and a windmill to drain the water from the clay pit excavated for brick-making. A brewhouse was built and a library in which classes in chemistry and mathematics were held, a school-house, a blacksmith's shop and a printing office. Colonists could eat either in common or in their own house, although all had to have the same food.

Recreation was carefully organised: cricket, bowls and dancing at the week-ends, with time given on Sundays to reading for the improvement of the mind. Elocution classes were held on Fridays and debates on Mondays. The land was cultivated and sown with wheat, mustard and oats, the workers going into the fields to the accompaniment of music. The Colonists received no money for their labours, however; instead they were given tickets which they could exchange for goods at the community's store.

¹ The weekly newspaper which, from 1834, disseminated the views of Owen and his followers.

² See W. H. G. Armytage: *Manea Fen: An Experiment in Agrarian Communitarianism*, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, vol. 38, No. 2, March 1956.

The manufacture of bricks, drainage pipes and tiles flourished to such an extent that in 1840 it was announced that these were available for sale to outside customers, together with stockings, since two knitters and their families had come from Leicestershire to join the community. The goods could be delivered by boat—the Colony possessed two craft—a sailing-boat and a six-oar—in which pleasure trips were made on the Old Bedford River.

In June 1840 the Colonists began to wear a uniform dress consisting, for the men, of trousers, green tunics and straw hats, these last to be replaced in winter by caps. The women wore tunics over short pantaloons.

The Manea Colony seemed destined to flourish as more workers arrived to join it, but the winter of 1840 proved disastrous. Hodson had spent several thousands of pounds on buildings and equipment as well as on the advancing to members of their shares in the estate which they held on a twenty-one-year lease and repaid at 5 per cent interest. An outside market for the products of the community had to be found and a scheme¹ proposed by Hodson to this end came to nothing. He could no longer continue to finance the project, especially since the failure of the bank of his friend, James Hill, meant that he could no longer rely on him for assistance.

So Hodson relinquished his presidency of the Colony and a committee of management took over. Chaos followed. Some of the Colonists stoutly supported Hodson, others were bitterly opposed to him. Many members resigned early in 1841, a few remained, trying to gain possession of their portion of the estate for which they had, in part, already paid, but even these were eventually forced to leave. Hodson himself departed for America and by 1851 the Colony was abandoned. *The History, Gazeteer and Directory of Cambridge* of that year, contains under the description of the village of Manea, the following:

From 100–200 of the disciples of Robert Owen, commonly called *Owenities*, located themselves here for about 12 months within the last few years. They occupied 150 acres of land, had everything in common, according to their system; and published (whilst here) a paper or pamphlet called *The Working Bee*. But alas! for the mutability of human institutions, the Socialists have fled.

In 1951 Mr C. F. Tebbutt visited Colony Farm on part of the site of Hodson's experiment, and found, he says, a small dilapidated

¹ See W. H. G. Armytage: *Manea Fen: An Experiment in Agrarian Communitarianism*, Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, vol. 38, No. 2, March 1956.

holding of about 30 acres or so at the end of a long drove which ends at the river bank.¹ An almost derelict but still inhabited house and some small outbuildings were all that remained, together with an old pit excavated by the colonists for their brick-making.

The choice of Manea Fen for such an experiment in community living and working certainly seems a strange one. Drainage of the Fen must, at that time, have been very ineffective, and there must have been severe flooding in winter, when the only contact with the outside world would have been by boat along the Old Bedford River or on horseback along its bank. Had the colony survived for longer the members who came to it from other parts of England would surely have found the surroundings remote and dreary despite the enthusiastic description given of the estate in 1838 by its first Secretary who declared² that the river running by it 'would form a beautiful promenade in the summer evening'.

In the mid-nineteenth century, when agricultural wages were low and it was often difficult for families to save money to buy clothes, many Cambridgeshire villages had *Clothing Clubs*, often administered by the local squire's wife. Villagers paid into these small sums as and when they could afford them and then, once a year, usually shortly before or after Christmas, the money was spent in the drapery shops of Cambridge, March, Ely and other towns. The custom had certain advantages over that of buying goods from the travelling tallymen who, later in the century, went round the villages and sometimes persuaded housewives to purchase, by weekly instalments, goods which were often not really needed and were frequently more expensive than those for sale in the shops.

Josiah Chater, who, in the 1840s, was apprenticed in the counting-house of William Eaden Lilley, a Cambridge draper, recorded on many occasions in his diary the visits to the shop of Clothing Clubs from near-by villages. In 1844, for example, he wrote on November 7th:

After breakfast we were very busy indeed—had the Longstanton Club—37 members.

On December 2nd:

We have been very busy getting things ready for Barnwell Club. We started off one waggon about $\frac{1}{4}$ to three and another about five, full of goods.

In 1845, on January 6th, he refers to the visit of the Dry Drayton Club and to 'looking out goods for Mr Haylock, the Balsham Club,

¹ Plate 71.

² *The New Moral World*, 12 Jan. 1839.

which is on Thursday'. On September 29th of that year 'the shop and warehouse were literally crammed all the morning' with buyers selecting goods for the Landbeach Club and for one of the Cambridge parochial Clothing Clubs. The date of this reference suggests that harvest wages had increased the village clubs' funds. In 1846 the Girton Club bought from Lilley's shop on December 2nd: 'the first time they have been here'.

APPENDIX I

Charity, Land-letting and Rental Customs

Charity Customs

William Farmer of Fulbourn, who died in 1732, bequeathed his estate to found a perpetual charity in the parish, the income from the land to be distributed to poor people every Sunday in the Church of All Saints. In his will, dated 3rd March 1712, he directed that only those who attended church regularly and there 'behaved themselves with the utmost gravity and seriousness' should be eligible to receive alms, and he left it to the discretion of the Vicar and the Churchwardens to select such people.

The Charity Commissioners reported in 1837 that the distribution of Farmer's Charity was restricted to married persons with families, widows and widowers, their names being written on tickets which were placed in a bag and then drawn by lots. Anyone whose name was drawn and who answered to it on its being read aloud, received sixpence. The drawn tickets were then put into another bag and later drawn in the same way when the first bag was empty.

When the Commissioners inquired why the money was not distributed in regular rotation they were told that many people would then attend church only when their turn came round.

The Commissioners suggested that tickets might be given and exchanged for money once or twice a year; this would mean that fewer people would attend church solely for the purpose of receiving the charity. The Vicar, however, did not wish to see his congregation diminished and said that, in his opinion, the old system had 'a good moral tendency,' the 'correctness of which opinion', stated the Commissioners, 'appears from the evidence extremely questionable'. They

had, in the course of their inquiries, been told that the charity money was often spent in the alehouse 'with more in addition', and that a publican, since deceased, who had been a schoolmaster in the village and who had sometimes distributed the money, used to try to persuade those who received it to spend it in his tavern.

The system of issuing tickets to be redeemed twice yearly for cash was later adopted and is still in use, the value of the sum paid out being according to the total number of tickets returned, the income from the capital being divided by this number. The majority of those who, on attending Matins and Evensong, receive tickets give the money back to the church, 'even old-age pensioners and widows', says the present Rector of Fulbourn, the Rev. A. B. Swallow, 'who appreciate this opportunity of giving extra help to their church which otherwise they might be unable to do'.

In the 1890s the tickets were redeemed once a quarter for a penny. W. R. Brown wrote¹ in 1897: 'Some of the aged beneficiaries have assured the writer that they get more in the long run by the penny ticket system than they did by the chance sixpence.'

The Rev. James Musgrave, Rector of Little Gransden from 1714 to 1717, bequeathed, by codicil to his will in 1744, land and property in the parish for the benefit of poor widows and widowers. The income from the property was to be distributed annually at six o'clock in the morning to all those eligible who came to the Musgrave family vault in the churchyard, when each widow and widower, together with the bellringer, who was to toll the bell for an hour, would receive a shilling. Any money left over was to be given, still at the vault, to poor families.

This charity was last distributed in 1961. During the eighty or so years preceding this attendance at the vault had not been required, the money being handed by the churchwardens to the recipients whose names were read out by the Rector. In modern times the former hour-long ceremony took only ten minutes.

John Huntingdon of Sawston, who held Huntingdon's Manor² in the first half of the sixteenth century, died in 1554. In his will he directed that whoever should hold the Manor in years to come should plant 2 acres of white peas every year 'in the Lenten field', and these were to be picked by the villagers on a day appointed by the trustees.

¹ *Cambridgeshire Cameos*, XXI, XXII, 1897-8.

² In 1086, at the Domesday Survey, this Manor was held by Roger de Someri under Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex. In 1302 it was held jointly by Ralph de Huntingdon, who became sole owner in 1303. Sir Edmund Huddleston, whose descendants still own and occupy Sawston Hall, purchased the Manor in 1576.

Should his wishes not be complied with, then the Manor lands were to pass to the churchwardens of the parish.

The picking usually takes place in July and lasts from mid-afternoon to dusk. Formerly villagers picked throughout the day, beginning at nine o'clock in the morning, when they entered the field led by the 'Queen' of the gleaners. Not only the poor pick the peas now, but in the past it was only the most needy of the villagers who did so and they not infrequently quarrelled and even fought among themselves in their efforts to get as much as possible of the crop.

It is a tradition that John Huntingdon made the bequest after he heard that a poor widow had been brought before the magistrates and later imprisoned for stealing a few peas.

Charities were frequently directed to be distributed on days of the year when gifts of money, bread, clothing or fuel would probably be most acceptable to the poor. Thus, for example, the alms provided by the Rev. Thomas Wakefield were, according to the wishes expressed in his will of 1626, to be dispensed to the needy of Horseheath at Christmas and Easter. In 1612 Philip Keaser, *alias* Webb, bequeathed 6s. 8d. annually for twenty years following his death, to be given to widows and widowers of the same parish on Good Fridays. Money left for the poor of Whittlesey was, by the will of Adam Kelfull in 1735, to be distributed after morning service in St Mary's Church on New Year's Day. This charity, the Charity Commissioners found in 1837, was also distributed on Easter Monday and they heard a complaint from a farmer of Coates, a hamlet of Whittlesey, that women in his employment failed to come to work, at 9d. a day, on distribution days, preferring to receive the 6d. charity money.

Bread charities were usually directed by their donors to be dispensed on Sundays after church service, thus ensuring that families of the poor had at least a minimum of food to support them until the following Sunday. December 21st, St Thomas's Day, was a popular charity distribution day. Perhaps the poor who then received alms were relieved of having to go *Gathering or Gooding* on that day, as has been described under *Calendar Customs*. The poor of Sawston, by the will of John Jefferie, who died in 1624, were given on each December 21st a coomb¹ of rye and one of barley, and bread on the occasion of the Beating of the Bounds. The same benefactor requested that a coomb of barley be distributed to the needy of Pampisford on Christmas Eve.²

¹ A *coomb* or *comb* is equivalent to four bushels.

² The Charity Commissioners' Report of 1837 said that these charities had lapsed.

Clothing, whether for schoolchildren, as at Bottisham,¹ or for the aged, was usually directed to be given only once a year—often at Christmas—or in every other year. Not infrequently wishes were expressed in will that the clothing was to be of a certain material, colour or design. John Swaine of Leverington, for example, in 1735 conveyed land in the parish to certain persons who were to devote the profits to providing three honest men with a strong kersey² coat each of cloth at 3s. a yard or thereabouts, and a pair of shoes at 4s. a pair. Three honest poor women were to have a strong gown each of serge at 1s. 2d. a yard and shoes at 2s. 6d. a pair.

Thomas D'Aye, a Cambridge apothecary who died in 1680, bequeathed by his will £160 for the purchase of land of which the profits were to be used to buy, in every second year, grey or russet warm cloth coats for the twelve poor men and women in the Spital House.³ The coats were to be 'made plain with 6 woollen buttons'.⁴ In the event of any of the old men or women dying, then their coats were to be handed to the next persons entering the almshouse. In 1948 the oldest inhabitant of the house said that in 1931—her first year there—and again in 1933 she received a sum of 13s. or 14s. and was told by the Almoner that these payments were in lieu of the red cloaks which used to be given to almswomen. Thomas D'Aye also directed that any money remaining after the purchase of the coats should be spent on neckcloths for the poor. By 1837 these were no longer provided.⁵

Bequests for the provision of almshouses did not often direct how the houses were to be built. John Yaxley, however, an Alderman of Cambridge, by his will of 1626 left an annual rent of £13 from an estate opposite Waterbeach Church to six poor widows who were to receive 10s. each and to live in almshouses⁶ to be erected in Waterbeach. These were to be built two years after the Alderman's death; they were to be 120 feet long in all and each dwelling was to

¹ See under Section I: *Child Care and Education*.

² *Kersey*: a kind of coarse, narrow cloth, woven from long wool and usually ribbed. ?from *Kersey* in Suffolk. *O.E.D.*

³ This hospital, dedicated to SS Anthony and Eligius, was founded in 1361 on the corner of Lensfield Road and Trumpington Street. In 1852 it was removed to St Anthony and Eligius Street, where the almshouses still stand.

⁴ An oval brass plaque, 4½ in. × 4 in., bearing the arms of the Day family, the date 1682 and details of the bequest, is now in the Cambridge Folk Museum. It was sent from London to the donor, the late Mr Louis Clark, and was presumably removed from the old building on its demolition in 1852.

⁵ Charity Commissioners Report, 1837.

⁶ The estate was left by Alderman Yaxley to his daughter, wife of John Robson of King's Lynn. Robson was executor of Yaxley's will and the almshouses came to be called Robson's Almshouses.

have two nether rooms of brick covered with tile and to have a brick wall 9 feet high in front.

The distribution of Coal Charities was, in the past, usually carried out by delivering the fuel at the doors of parish churches to be collected from there by those eligible to receive it. This was the custom in the case of Wulfe's Charity (1516) in Cambridge until the Charity Commissioners in 1937 suggested that tickets be issued which could be exchanged for coal. Peterhouse, which owns the land upon which the charity is charged, used to have 80 bushels of coal sent, each St Thomas's Day and at Easter, to the doors of the twelve parish churches named in the bequest.

An elderly Madingley woman recalled in 1955 the distribution at the end of the last century of the Bread and Coal Charity left by Lady Coton of Madingley Hall. The coal was brought to the village from Cambridge a few days before Christmas and unloaded into the old Pound. In the evening flares were lit and fathers of families, after they had come home from work and had had their evening meal, went with wheelbarrows to the Pound and waited in line to hear their names read out by one of the Charity Trustees. Each man then shovelled into his barrow an amount of coal proportionate to the size of his family. Many of the village mothers came, too, each to receive a large loaf for herself, another for her husband and a small one for each of her children. The same old lady could remember that, when she was a child, old men and women in Madingley were given tickets so that they could buy in Cambridge enough flannel to make two shirts for each man and two petticoats for each woman. 'This went on until the last of the old folk died.'

*Dorcas Societies*¹ were a popular form of charity in the last century for the provision of clothing for the poor. Money was usually raised by donations and subscriptions and, as in Wisbech, where a Dorcas Charity was established in St Peter's parish in 1813, distributed to the needy in the form of tickets. These could be exchanged on certain days for clothing. In Wisbech the sum to be spent by each person was not to exceed 6s.

As in the case of clothing, donors of charities sometimes specified that a certain food—apart from bread—was to be given to the poor. In Duxford, for example, the *Herring Gift* consisted of red herrings purchased with money from land and distributed annually in November.

¹ *Dorcas*: name of a woman mentioned in Acts ix. 36; hence *Dorcas Society*, a ladies' association in a church for making and providing clothes for the poor. *O.E.D.*

In addition to bequests of food, money or clothing for the poor, charitable persons not infrequently left in their wills instructions that annual sums be spent on such practical things as the maintenance and repair of the church clock, the salary of the bellringer or the repair of their own or a relative's tomb. Mrs Elizabeth Cook of Clapham, widow of the famous explorer Captain Cook, left to the Vicar and Churchwardens of the church of St Andrew the Great in Cambridge, £1,000 in Consols, the interest from which was to be spent on keeping in perpetual repair the monument to her husband and family on the north wall of the chancel. Any residue, after payment of £2 to the minister, was to be distributed to the poor of the parish. Mr Edward Noyes, who died in 1801, left to the same parish the sum of £27. 0s. 6d., the interest from which was to be used for the upkeep of his own tomb. Any surplus was to be spent on the purchase of bread for the poor.

In 1525, by deed poll, Robert Wright and Robert Casbred of Fulbourn gave to certain people 13 acres of land—Wright's Clock Land—directing that the profits be spent on repairing and keeping in good order the clock of St Vigor's Church and on ringing the curfew and day bell yearly from Michaelmas to St Martin's Day. The Charity Commissioners reported in 1837 that 13s. was being paid for winding the clock and ringing the bell four times a day; 11s. was being spent on an annual dinner, while any surplus was devoted to repairing and improving the clock, steeple and tower of the church.

At Haslingfield the Commissioners reported that 'from time immemorial' the rents of woodland known as *Clock Holt* had been used for winding and keeping in repair the church clock. The original donor of the land was unknown.

A popular and practical form of benefaction was an endowment for the apprenticing of poor boys—and sometimes girls—so that they could learn a useful trade. Many such apprenticeship charities were founded in Cambridgeshire between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Among those philanthropists who concerned themselves with providing employment for the poor was the Cambridge carrier Thomas Hobson. In 1628, two years before his death, he conveyed on trust to six burgesses of Cambridge and six representatives of the University land and buildings in the parish of St Andrew the Great, desiring that within four years a house or houses be erected. These were to be used as a workhouse for training the poor in spinning and weaving and as a House of Correction for unruly and stubborn rogues, beggars

and others who refused to work. Wool, flax and other materials were eventually to be provided for use by the inmates.¹

In his will Hobson left £100 to the Corporation for the purchase of lands for the workhouse and the charity was further enriched by other legacies, notably that of John Bowtell in 1813, who bequeathed the sum of £500, directing that it was to be used for 'placing out poor boys, natives of Cambridge, as apprentices to learn some useful art, thereby to enable them to gain a comfortable living'.

Hobson's Workhouse came to be known as the Spinning House² and until the opening years of the nineteenth century spinning was carried on there under the direction of a Master who was a worsted-weaver.

Loan Charities provided another practical way for well-disposed persons to benefit their poorer neighbours by enabling them to borrow sums of money to improve their trade or business. As early as 1459 Richard Andrewe, *alias* Spycer, a burgess of Cambridge, left by will the sum of 80 marks which he directed should be placed by the Mayor and Corporation in a chest to be kept in the Guildhall. Burgesses were to be able to borrow up to 28s. 6d. each on pledges which were to be redeemed within a year and a month. As was customary in his day, Spycer ensured that prayers should be said for his soul and the souls of his wife and parents by ordering that, on returning their borrowed money, those who were literate should recite the *De profundis*. The illiterate were to say three times the *Pater* followed by an *Ave* and the Apostles' Creed.³

By the gift of £2,000 made in 1566 to the Corporation of Bristol by Sir Thomas White, an Alderman of London, the Corporation of Cambridge, in turn with a number of other cities and towns, received £100 on eleven occasions between the years 1592 and 1835, when the Charity was placed under the management of trustees appointed by the Lord Chancellor. The money was lent to four poor young men for a term of ten years, preference being given to clothiers.⁴

¹ Home spinning by the poor was encouraged in Soham in 1795 by the use of charity funds; 5d. per pound of yarn was distributed in addition to the 7d. given to home spinners by the workers employed in the local industry. The scheme was dropped in 1798, then revived in 1810 when spinning wheels were purchased for the poor from Parish Stock funds. Gradually, however, the woolmen only paid 4d. a pound to home workers, while the charity trustees had to make up the sum to 1s. The scheme was finally abandoned in 1830.

² The Spinning House became notorious from the late eighteenth century when it was, until 1901, used by the University as a prison for prostitutes. This led to much bitter feeling between Town and University.

³ C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, I, 210.

⁴ *op. cit.*, II, 228; IV, 585, 603; V, 417, 513.

Dr Stephen Perse, founder of the Free Grammar School in Cambridge now known as the Perse School, died in 1615 and left £1,000 each to the Corporations of Cambridge, Bury St Edmunds and King's Lynn. The sums were to be lent to honest young tradesmen who could receive up to £40 each for a ten-year period.¹ Similar bequests were made by several Cambridge burgesses, including John Crane, who died in 1652. He left money to the Corporation to be lent to 'three young men towards ye setting them upp' and also to the University for the medical needs of poor students when they fell ill. He gave, too, £1,000 to the University 'to be lent gratis to an honest man, the better to enable him to buy good fish and fowl for the University having observed much sickness occasioned by unwholesome food in that kind'.²

Among other practical gifts made by will was that of Lady Joan Jermy of Teversham in 1729 for the provision of a dinner on the annual rent day. Geoffrey Bishop of Fulbourn in 1474 bequeathed land to his executors, directing that the rents thereof were to be used for paying Peter Pence³ and Ely Farthings⁴ for the whole of Fulbourn so that the inhabitants should be freed from these taxes for ever. When these taxes, following the Reformation, were no longer levied, the charity money was used for discharging the church and poor rates of poor cottagers.

Writing in 1808 of the parish of Bottisham, Lysons⁵ refers to 'various benefactions (which) in ancient times were given for the maintenance of lights in Lode-street, Long-meadow and Bottisham Street which were of great use to direct travellers in the night'.

Another practical charity was provided by Dr Jobson of Wisbech, who left in his will of 1828, among other bequests, money to buy basses⁶ which were to be sold only to those who had seats in St Peter's Church, at a cost price of 1s. 3d. each until all who wished for them had been provided.

Pieces of land originally designated for providing charity funds were often named by executors and trustees in accordance with the

¹ *op. cit.*, III, 94-5.

² *op. cit.*, III, 450-1; V, 513.

³ Annual tribute of one penny paid at the feast of St Peter to the see of Rome. The tax was collected in England from 740 until it was abolished by Henry VIII.

⁴ A hearth tax of one farthing a year on each house or chimney in every parish of the Ely Dioceses. The tribute was sometimes called *Smoke Farthings*.

⁵ D. and S. Lysons: *Magna Britannia*, 1808, vol. II, 92.

⁶ *Bass*: 1. The inner bark of the lime or linden; *loosely* any similar fibre. 2. A fibre obtained from certain palms . . . a mat or hassock . . . made of this. *O.E.D.*

objects of the charity. In this way field names can serve as reminders not only of existing charities but of those which, in course of time, have become lost or may now be distributed in a different form. In Comberton the *Herring Land*, whose rents came to be distributed in small annual sums to the needy, were by tradition said to have been 8 acres which were given for the purchase of herrings for the poor. Poores' Fens, Poores' Lands and Town Lands occur in many parts of the county.

Thomas Oslar of Fulbourn, by will dated 1722, left £13 for the purchase of an acre of land of which the annual rent was to be distributed on his birthday, St Thomas's Day, to four poor widows. He left instructions to the churchwardens of St Vigor's that they and his executors were to walk round the land with some of the parish widows and to call it the *Widows' Acre*. The sum of 2s. 6d. was to be spent on beer and food to refresh them after their perambulation.

Reporting on the charities of Swaffham Bulbeck in 1837 the Charity Commissioners referred to an acre of land in the open field which was known as *Plum Cake Acre* and stated: 'Before the inclosure the tenant of a farm called Abbey Farm . . . during those years in which the open field was under the village, used to give a slice of cake and a glass of ale to all parishioners who applied for it. Every third year the land was dispastured and the gift consequently interrupted.'

The place-names in Soham of *Coat Piece* and *Bonnet Close* probably designated land held by trustees to provide coats and bonnets for the poor. In 1837 the Charity Commissioners reported of the *Maiden's Land* in West Wickham: 'There is a notion among the poor that land of this name was given years ago for their relief by a maiden lady. The land seems to derive its name from having formed part of a jointure but there does not appear any ground whatsoever for believing that it was ever held for charitable purposes.'

An unusual donor of a charity was reported by the Commissioners at Stow-cum-Quy:

£1. 4s. has been paid for many years for the schooling of three poor girls in reading and spelling. It is probably a payment by way of interest on £20 stated by the Parliamentary Returns as being in the hands of the parish officers which is corroborated by the tradition that £20, called *Tinker's Money* was paid by a drunken tinker into the hands of the great-uncle of the present lord of the Manor for charitable purposes.

Charitable bequests are, for the most part, for the benefit of the poor inhabitants of their donors' own town or parish. Mrs Lettice Martin of Chrishall, however, chose a singular way of deciding who

should receive alms. In her will of 1562 she directed that the poor of every parish whose church or spire she could see from the top of Heydon Hill should receive an annual payment.¹ Many Cambridgeshire parishes—among them Ickleton, Meldreth, Great and Little Shelford, Thriplow, Cherryhinton, Duxford, Stapleford and Fowlmere—benefited from her bequest, most of them to the amount of 26s. annually distributed to the poor.

Soup Charities

Soup is distributed by Corpus Christi College during three weeks in December each year to ninety poor persons. At the end of the last century a Soup Kitchen was set up in the winter months in Newmarket Road, Cambridge, financed by the Cambridge Poor Relief Sick Fund. Tickets could be obtained from tradesmen and exchanged for soup which was sold at a penny a quart, about half the cost price.

The oldest Soup Charity in the county is distributed by St John's College. Known as the *Poor's Bread*, or the *Poor's Soup* or, more recently, as the *Bread and Broth Charity*, it probably dates from the time of the Hospital of St John the Evangelist, which was founded in 1135 on the site of the present First Court of the College.

Traditionally the broth is served first on December 27th, St John the Evangelist's Day, and during the twelve following weeks, but the present custom is to make the first distribution on the Thursday before Christmas and on each Thursday evening for the next twelve weeks. Fifty poor people receive each time a gallon of soup, a piece of mutton or beef and a 2 lb. loaf. Before the Second World War 1 lb. of meat was given to each person, but this quantity has now been halved. At 5.30 on the distribution evenings a Fellow of the College, wearing gown and square, goes to the College Kitchen, where the Butler hands him a bowl of the soup to taste and approve before it is given out.

Until early in this century people came from outlying villages to obtain the soup, and it was a common sight to see them, together with the poor and aged of Cambridge, making their way towards the College, armed with metal cans to hold the broth and with white cloths in which to wrap the bread. Today, however, Red Cross and Royal Women's Voluntary Service workers collect the bread and soup and deliver it to the poor and infirm in vans. The Senior Bursar of the College receives applications for the Charity, mainly through parochial clergy and social workers, and checks off the names of those who receive it.

¹ F. Wale: *Survey of Great and Little Shelford, 1902-20.*

In both the First and Second World Wars a special allocation of meat and bread was made by the Ministry of Food so that the long-established distribution of the Poor's Broth could be made.

Today each issue of soup is made to the following recipe:¹

24 lb. of best split yellow peas
14 lb. of carrots
10 lb. of onions
10 lb. of celery
A quantity of turnips.

These are boiled in water in a very large steam copper. During the afternoon the pieces of meat are added and the whole mixture then simmers slowly until the meat is cooked, when it is removed from the broth, to which salt, pepper and dried mint are added. The soup is thinned slightly with water before it is served.

Land-letting Customs

Until about the year 1890 the parish allotments in Wicken were let out in the local inn to the highest bidder while a match or wax vesta was burned. The last person to bid before the flame died out was allotted the land. The name of each man was recorded in a book and as each piece of land was put up for auction a fresh match was lit.

At Impington a similar custom was observed until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. Here, however, a candle stuck with pins at one-inch intervals was used. The bidding for each piece of land continued until the candle burned down to a pin which then fell out on the table. The successful bidder was the man who made his offer just before the pin dropped.

Rent Day Customs

Until the last century many landowners gave a dinner to their tenants on the annual Rent Day. In Little Abington, for example, rents were paid on September 25th at the Lodge up to one o'clock in the afternoon. At six o'clock in the evening the Rent Supper was held in the Three Tuns. Each man received a briar pipe, two ounces of tobacco; his wife was given half a crown. After dinner there was

¹ Kindly supplied by Mr S. Dring, Kitchen Manager of St John's College.

singing until after midnight and the festivities always ended with the serving of rum punch.¹

A Histon landowner of the late nineteenth century always gave a Rent Supper to his tenants. The village baker cooked the joints for the feast in his oven and the meal was followed by singing.¹

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institutes of Abington and Histon.

APPENDIX II

Food and Drink

Until early in this century a great deal of bread was baked at home and the long wooden troughs in which the dough was kneaded were a feature of many Cambridgeshire farmhouse and cottage kitchens. One of these troughs, 42 inches long, 18 inches wide and 34 inches high, now in the Cambridge Folk Museum, was used weekly in the 1860s to the 1890s by a Grantchester woman, mother of thirteen children, when she made bread for her family. Liquid barm,¹ obtainable from the brewers, was the raising agent commonly used by both home and commercial bakers until about the time of the First World War, when it was replaced by compressed yeast. More recently dried yeast, resembling small pale brown pearls, can be purchased for the relatively small amount of home bread-making now done by housewives. Until the end of the last century the Colleges in Cambridge had their own bakehouses.

When the old coal- or wood-heated ovens were in use bakers in Cambridge and the villages baked for their customers home-prepared dough as well as Sunday dinners, Christmas poultry and cakes too large to go into small household ovens. Many people can recall seeing housewives and children going round to the bakery after Sunday-morning service armed with white cloths with which to cover the joints which had been cooking while the families were in church.

In Over in the last century the baker's daughter used to ring a bell to let the villagers know that the oven was ready for them to bring their bread dough² to be baked.

In Balsham, when the old bakery near the entrance to the Bell Inn

¹ *Barm*: the froth that forms on the top of fermenting malt liquors; used to leaven bread and to ferment other liquors. *O.E.D.*

² Several elderly Cambs. people have recalled that people used to carry dough to their local bakers in large white cloth bags or even pillow cases.

yard was pulled down in 1957, Mr Arthur Gray, then aged 80, recalled that the oven had been built by his father to replace the one used previously by his grandfather. It was heated by a furnace at the side until it was hot enough for the bread to be inserted. Then a water-filled *upright*—or *upset* as it was called by many Cambridgeshire bakers—was placed between the fire and the oven so that the latter became filled with steam, which gave a glossy top to the loaves. The fire was then closed down and the bread put in on the long wooden shovel or *peel*.

On Thursday afternoons Mr Gray used to bake bread for the old women of the village who had gleaned wheat from the fields, had it ground into flour, which they then brought to the bakery to be made into dough. For this service he charged the small sum of a halfpenny a loaf. During the First World War, so that Balsham people could save their own fuel, Mr Gray used to cook Sunday dinners at a charge of 3d. each.

Until 1966, when the firm had to cease the service because they no longer used the old-type ovens, Maskell's Bakery in Victoria Road, Cambridge, cooked a large number of turkeys each Christmas for customers whose ovens were too small to contain the birds. There are still one or two bakers in the county who are able to do this.

Friday seems to have been the traditional day for home bread- and cake-making. W. H. Barrett recalls that his grandmother in Brandon Creek baked her bread on that day, having mixed the dough on the preceding day, when the brewer's dray visited the district and she could obtain the necessary barm. The dough was left to rise all night in front of the turf fire.

Visible from her windows in the mid-nineteenth century were a number of the wind-driven drainage mills which maintained the level of the water in the fen dykes, and she would look at the mill sails to see from what direction the wind was blowing. If it lay in the north-east she made only cottage loaves; if it was blowing from the south-west she baked her dough in tins.

To determine how long the loaves should be in the oven she used to insert a hog's bristle in a small hole at the top of her oven, leaving about an inch protruding. While the bread was baking the bristle quivered; when it remained still, showing that the part inside the oven had shrivelled away, she knew that the bread was ready for removal. Alternatively she would place a penny on top of a hard slab of beeswax which she put in an earthenware dish on the top of the oven; when the penny dropped to the bottom of the dish the bread was cooked.

A Cambridge woman aged 79 said in 1950 that when she was a child, living in East Road, her mother estimated the time that her loaves should be in the oven each Friday morning by the boy who delivered meat in the street. If she put the dough in when he called at the house opposite she knew she could take the loaves out when he came past on his return journey. It appears that this rough-and-ready time-keeping, made easier by the fact that the boy whistled popular songs loudly as he went on his rounds, seldom if ever failed!

Cambridgeshire has not been noted for any particular type of local bread or traditional shape of loaf, but within the past few years Cambridge has given its name to the *Cambridge Formula Loaf*. This bread is not, however, made in Cambridge and indeed can be obtained in many parts of the country, but its manufacture is the result of research by Cambridge scientists. It is a high-protein bread containing wheat germ, wheat oil, soya flour, minerals and vitamins and is recommended by dieticians for people wishing to lose weight and for those, particularly elderly people, whose normal diet may contain a deficiency of protein.

Very few *Muffins* are now made in Cambridgeshire, although until early in this century many local bakers made them. They were often taken round the streets of Cambridge and elsewhere by boys and men who carried them on wooden trays which they balanced on a ring-shaped pad on top of their heads.¹ The ringing of a small hand-bell announced the muffin man's arrival so that housewives could make their purchases at their own doors. *Crumpets* are still made, mainly by the multiple firms who supply so much of the county's bread nowadays. Many older Cambridgeshire people, especially those in the Isle of Ely, call crumpets *Pikelets*, a name which they often gave also to muffins.

Dough Cakes, sometimes called *Lardy Cakes*, were, until the period between the two World Wars, a popular product of many Cambridgeshire bakers. The cakes, made of yeast-raised dough and containing a liberal amount of fat, sugar and dried fruits, were baked in circular tins. Some housewives were accustomed to bake their own at home, purchasing the dough from the baker and then adding the fat, sugar and fruit.

No traditional cake or tart is especially connected with Cambridgeshire, but of course when so many small bakers were in business many of them became locally well known for certain of their own products. Many elderly Cambridge people can recall, for example, the excellent sponge cakes and Victoria sandwiches made at Collier's bakery in St

¹ Plate 72.

Andrew's Street or the shiny-topped penny and halfpenny currant buns sold by F. W. Legge in Fitzroy Street or William Christmas (inevitably known to children as Father Christmas) in Green Street. Currant buns, indeed, were a popular delicacy, often displayed in shop windows or on counters on black baking sheets straight from the oven. Many bakers sold any that were left over at half price or less on the following day, and even now the little shop attached to Maskell's Bakery in Victoria Road, Cambridge, is a popular place for children to call at to see if there are any left-over buns or bread rolls for sale. In the past the stale buns were bought by many of the poorer Cambridgeshire mothers: soaked in milk or custard they made an economical pudding. W. H. Barrett recalls that when he was a boy children could buy for a penny several overbaked currant buns made by Thurston, the Littleport baker. The buns were invariably called 'burnt bricks'.

Until the First World War *butter* was sold in Cambridge and adjoining villages in rolls a yard long and about an inch thick, each roll weighing about a pound. The custom probably arose because the Colleges found the rolls convenient for cutting up into *sizes* for the undergraduates. The butter, made in many Cambridgeshire villages, was shaped by hand on long boards and brought into Cambridge in long wicker baskets.¹ For greater convenience, especially in hot weather, most grocers cut the rolls into halves and quarters before wrapping them in damp muslin and displaying them on the counters. The village of Over was one of the chief butter-making centres and usually set the retail selling price.

The village of Cottenham was, until the 1930s, well known for its cheese. Two varieties were made: a white Single Cottenham and a blue-veined Double Cottenham resembling the Stilton cheese. The long-established Cambridge grocery firm of G. P. Jones & Sons confirm the traditional story that the Cottenham cheeses were first made by a family who established themselves in the village from Leicestershire, where they had been making Stilton, and who attempted to produce, using local milk, the same type of cheese with which they were familiar.

The 1851 *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Cambridgeshire* states that 'the parish and vicinity have long been famous for the production of a celebrated cheese of a peculiar flavour'. It also refers to the making of a similar Stilton-type cheese at Soham in the last century.

Cottenham cheese-making declined gradually after the enclosure of the parish when the land which had formerly supported about

¹ Plate 73.

1,500 cows was used for cereal growing. There is a tradition, too, that frequent outbreaks of cattle plague in the village led to the ultimate use of pasture land for the fruit-growing for which Cottenham is now noted. Until early in this century it was believed that mounds in certain fields should never be touched because, it was said, they covered the bodies of cattle destroyed by the plague.

It was possible, until the early 1930s, to obtain Cottenham cheese in a few Cambridge shops, but there do not seem, now, to be many people who remember buying it.

Cambridgeshire is still noted for the soft milk and cream cheeses known as *Cambridge Cheese*, *Ely Cheese* or *Cambridgeshire Cheese*. Many small local dairies made them in the past; now their manufacture is confined to the Rathmore Dairies in Sutton, near Ely. They are sold, as they have been for centuries, on small straw mats which, in the past, were made by cottagers in the county. Now they are imported from Hong Kong.

The milk cheese is brick-shaped, the sides higher than the centre. The cream cheese, shaped into small oblong or square blocks, were, until earlier in this century, usually sold wrapped in muslin instead of the paper or cellophane more commonly used now. Until shortly before the Second World War it was possible to buy 'half and half' Cambridge cheeses; these were made of milk and cream, the difference in the two being clearly visible in the colour—the milk 'half' being white and forming the base of the block, the cream 'half' being yellow.

The Cambridge cheese, being unseasoned, was, and is, often broken up with a fork by housewives, who then add pepper, salt and vinegar and serve it, with salad, or as a sandwich filling, as 'mock crab'.

Before milk for home consumption had to be pasteurised many housewives made their own milk cheese by placing sour milk into a muslin bag which was then hung up to drain. Pasteurised milk acquires a stronger flavour when it turns sour, so that it does not lend itself so readily to the making of soft cheese. A 75-year-old Cambridge woman said, however, in 1967, that she still makes her own Cambridge milk cheese, buying sour milk from a dairy near her home.

The old Paradise Street Higher Grade Boys' School¹ in Cambridge had no playground, so the boys had to spend their recreation periods

¹ This school, opened in 1871, moved in 1913 to Melbourne Place, where it later became the Central School and then the Boys' Grammar School. The Paradise Street premises are now occupied by the offices of the Co-operative Society.

in the street. Several Cambridge men, now in their seventies, who attended the school can remember that on summer mornings, just as they were released for play, a man would arrive with a barrow containing paper-wrapped penny slabs of ice-cream, which was known as hokey-pokey.¹ Many Cambridge people, too, can recall the 'hokey-pokey' man who, early in the century, stationed himself near the entrance to Christ's Pieces in Drummer Street with his ice-cream barrow, which had a striped awning supported on twisted brass poles. Similar ice-cream barrows appeared at Midsummer Fair, their owners nearly always being said to be Italians. The sight of a 'hokey-pokey' man was greeted by the chanting of:

Hokey-pokey, penny a lump,
The more you eat, the more you jump.

An alternative version has also been recorded:

Here's the stuff to make you jump—
Hokey-pokey, penny a lump.

Until the use of biscuit wafers and cones became general in the 1920s small sweet shops and tea shops sold ice-cream in glasses of varying sizes according to the price of their contents. Two of these are illustrated on Plate 74. These containers were solid at the base of the bowl—this is indicated by the shadow on the illustration—so they contained far less ice-cream than they appeared to do. How disappointing it was for a child when he plunged his spoon through what seemed to be a tall mound of ice, only to find that it at once reached the bottom of the glass. Spoons *could* be used, but ices served in this way, especially in sweet shops, were sometimes inelegantly licked; the glasses, therefore, were often known as *Lickers*.

The sweet shops which in Cambridge and elsewhere in the county made their own ice-cream during the summer months generally used hand-turned freezers. The owner of a small shop in Fitzroy Street, Cambridge, who succeeded her parents in the business, recalled in 1959 how, in the years 1910–14, she and her brothers and sisters would be made to turn the freezer when they came home from school. When the Midsummer Fair was held the fair women used, she said, to come to the shop each morning at about eleven o'clock

¹ *Hokey-pokey*. Also *hoky-poky*. 1. (altered from *hocus-pocus*) Deception . . . 2. A cheap kind of ice-cream, sold by street vendors. *O.E.D.*, which refers to the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 25 Sept. 1888 re the correct origin of 'Hokey Pokey, a penny a lump'. An incident is related as tending to identify the term with the Italian *O che poco!* O how little! The *British Empire Universities Mod. Eng. Dict.* (1916) gives *Hokey-pokey*: a common kind of ice-cream sold in slabs.

to eat ices. Chairs and a small table or two were put out for them and the ice-cream was specially well made, on these occasions, with the best butter and cream, since the women were prepared to pay as much as a shilling each for them.

Ice-cream making was a precarious business in the days before refrigerators were in general use. Small shopkeepers often found that a cool summer's day left a good portion of the product on their hands, so that it had either to be given away to children or wasted.

The Fens, in the past, provided a plentiful supply of freshwater fish for Cambridgeshire consumers. Eels, either boiled or in pies, were particularly popular, although the taste for them has declined in modern times. Edmund Carter in his *History of Cambridge* published in 1753, refers to the customary days for fish selling in the Cambridge Market Place as Wednesdays and Fridays. On Saturdays 'there is seldom any fish to be had but eels and jacks¹ which are extraordinarily cheap'. Seafish—mackerel, herring and sprats—from the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts were, he considered, very reasonable in price considering the distance which they had to come. Salmon and sturgeon were 'sometimes brought to this market' and could be bought for about a shilling a pound, while in the June of 1749 there was such an abundance of salmon that it was sold at the record low price of 4d. a pound.

Colchester oysters were eaten in large quantities in Cambridgeshire between July 25th and the latter part of April each year; they figured on the menus of many University and civic dinners and many were sold and eaten at Stourbridge Fair.

A curious discovery was made on Midsummer Eve, 1626, inside a cod which had been caught off King's Lynn and sent for sale in Cambridge market. The fishmonger, when opening the fish, found a small book inside, wrapped in canvas. Benjamin Prime, the University Bedell, was standing near at the time and he took the book to the Vice-Chancellor, who had it cleaned, re-bound and sent to the University Library. The volume was reprinted in the following year under the title *Vox Piscis or The Book Fish containyng Three treatises² which were found in the belly of A Cod-fish in Cambridge Market on Midsummer Eve last, Anno Domini 1626*.

Market-garden produce has for long been offered for sale in

¹ *Jack*: a young or small pike. *O.E.D.*

² The treatises were: 1. The preparation to the Crosse and to Death and of the comfort under the Crosse and death . . . (by Richard Tracy, first printed in 1540). 2. A Mirrour or Glasse to know thy Selfe. A Treatise . . . (by John Frith while he was Prisoner in the Tower of London) (1533). 3. The Treasure of Knowledge . . . C. H. Cooper: *Annals of Cambridge*, III, 196.

large quantities in Cambridgeshire markets and shops, most of it grown in the county. In Cambridge the Peas Hill adjoining the main Market Place was for long reserved for the sellers of herbs and vegetables, but modern traffic conditions have for some years prohibited the erection of stalls on this site. Early in the last century there were several market gardens within the town from which housewives could buy fresh vegetables. Diaries kept by Cambridge residents in the 1830s, now preserved in the Folk Museum, contain many references to the purchase of lettuces, cucumbers, onions and so on at, for example, the Garden of Eden near Parker's Piece. The site of this garden was later developed for housing, but its name is perpetuated in Eden Street, Paradise Street, and Adam and Eve Row.

Vegetables, home-grown or obtainable relatively cheaply in shops and markets of the county, helped to eke out more expensive meat. The traditional farm labourer's docky or beaver¹ was a raw onion with a thick slice of bread and, perhaps, butter and cheese, all of these cut and often conveyed to the mouth with the folding docky knife.

Onion Clangers were a well-known dish in villages of south Cambridgeshire. They were made from a suet crust, rolled out and spread with chopped onions and whatever meat was available. The whole was then rolled up and boiled in a cloth. Onion Puddings, too, made an economical supper. They were boiled in basins previously lined with suet crust and filled with onions and, perhaps, a little meat or sliced sausages.

A woman born in Hildersham in 1902 recalled in 1965 that when she was a child her mother used to add to beefsteak puddings *morels*,² considered a great delicacy, which were gathered at a local farm.

In many poorer Cambridgeshire households up to the 1880s a *water mess* provided a breakfast or supper for both adults and children. This was made by placing a thick slice of bread in a basin, sprinkling over it pepper and salt and then pouring hot water on to it. A *milk mess* or *milk sop*³ was similarly made, using milk instead of water. To both a knob of butter, if it could be spared, was added.

Old cookery books refer to and give recipes for both Oxford and Cambridge Sausages: whether there was a sausage traditionally peculiar to Cambridge has been a matter of some debate. The 1869 edition of Warne's *Model Cookery and Housekeeping Book* gives the ingredients of the Oxford Sausage as: 1 lb. of lean veal, 1 lb. of young

¹ See *Glossary* below.

² *Morel*: an edible fungus of the genus *Morchella*, esp. *M. esculenta*. *O.E.D.*

³ This dish is also known in Chrishall and neighbourhood as *milk crowdie*.

pork, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of grated bread, the peel of half a lemon, a nutmeg grated, 6 sage leaves, salt, pepper, thyme, savory and marjoram, all of these, after being well pounded and mixed, to be inserted into skins. The same book's recipe for the skinless sausages traditionally characteristic of Oxford is: $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of pig meat cut from the griskin,¹ $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of veal, $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of beef suet, 5 eggs, pepper, salt and dried sage. The mixture was shaped into sausages then dipped in egg and fried.

Warne's Cambridge Sausage contained $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of beef, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of veal, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of pork, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of bacon, pepper, salt, sweet herbs and sage leaves. These ingredients, after pounding, were inserted into skins. The compiler and editor of the book, Mary Jewry, says that 'Cambridge sausages are thought best for breakfast'.

It is probable that many of the sausages made in small quantities in the past in villages adjoining Cambridge and brought, along with garden produce, eggs and poultry, for sale in the market, contained a mixture of any meat available. The elderly donor to the Cambridge Folk Museum of a small combined mincer and sausage filler said in 1950 that his father and grandfather, who had used the mincer in Swavesey to make sausages which they sold on Saturdays in Cambridge market, added beef, bacon and even mutton to eke out the pork.

Many people recall the advertisements for Palethorpe's Cambridge Sausages which, earlier in this century, were to be seen on many railway stations. It is a tradition that the owner of this Staffordshire firm, following a visit to Cambridge, thought that the name of the town would make a good brand name for his products. Several Cambridge butchers, too, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, acquired a local reputation for the sausages which they made, and some of these were claimed to be true Cambridge Sausages. The late W. A. Rose, butcher, thought that it was the addition of sage which made the local sausage different from all others; the herb is, however, used in sausage-making in many parts of the country.

Mr F. O. Marsh, managing director of the firm of Winton Smith Ltd, which was established in Cambridge in 1910 and has always been noted for the excellence of its pork, has made extensive research into the traditional Cambridge Sausage. The firm has recently begun the manufacture of one which is marketed under that name; it contains a high percentage of pork—no other meat being used—and a special cereal 'filler' is one of its ingredients.

The excellence of the sausages formerly made in the kitchens of the various Colleges probably explains why both Oxford and Cam-

¹ Griskin: lean part of loin of bacon pig. *O.E.D.*

bridge became noted for them. Undergraduates returning home during the vacations would speak highly of them and in this way the Universities acquired a reputation for the delicacy. Local butchers would be asked by visitors for Oxford or Cambridge Sausages and so acquired, too, a name for good sausage-making. The quality of pork reared in the county has, too, some part in the matter. Pork has always been popular in Cambridgeshire. Its relative cheapness, in the past, compared with other meats made it attractive to the housewives, while a home-bred pig could provide a cottager with an abundance of food.

Before specially prepared rusk was available as an ingredient of sausages, breadcrumbs had to be used. These tended to go sour in hot weather and doubtless led to the belief that sausages should not be eaten 'unless there was an R in the month'. Many elderly people, even in these days of refrigeration and when preservatives are added to most commercially produced sausages, feel a little uneasy at the thought of buying these or pork in May, June, July and August.

Up to the years between the two World Wars Cambridgeshire was noted for the *brawn*¹ made by many local butchers. The taste for it has now to some extent declined, although it is still obtainable, and, of course, is made at home by some housewives. Tripe, too, is less popular than it used to be, although in Cambridge tripe dressing was carried on until 1924 in Fitzroy Street, as it had been since the 1860s.

The brawn—called *Pork Cheese* by many Cambridgeshire people—was usually moulded in small basins for convenience of sale, and consisted of a solid mixture of pork meat set in a rich jelly. Until c. 1903 the best-known maker of it in Cambridge was the firm of Jennings on Peas Hill; in the last century an excellent brawn was made at the Rose Inn at Stapleford and sent to Cambridge for sale in the Bell Inn, also on Peas Hill.

To make the brawn a pig's head was boiled for two or three hours until the meat could be removed easily from the bones. This meat was then chopped, while still hot, into small pieces, seasoned with salt, pepper and spices and then pressed into tins or basins on the top of which a heavy weight was placed. When quite cold the brawn could be removed from the container by dipping the latter in hot water for a minute to allow the contents to slide out easily. Today the product is sold in silver foil or waxed cardboard containers.

Pigs' Trotters are not now thought of as a typical Cambridgeshire

¹ *Brawn*: the flesh of the boar; esp. (in recent use) collared, boiled, and pickled or potted. *O.E.D.*

dish, but until the end of the last century they could be bought, ready-cooked, at many butchers' shops and, especially in the working-class districts of Cambridge, they were taken round the streets in the early evenings so that housewives could buy them at their doors. Two Cambridge men, now in their late seventies, can remember that when they were about five years old and living in widely separated districts of Cambridge—one near New Square, the other off Castle Street—the sound of the pigs' trotters man's bell in the street was the signal for bed-time. The trotters, steaming hot, were carried by the man on an enamel tray balanced on his head.

When College kitchens had a surplus of *dripping* left over from the roasting of joints they used to dispose of this, especially during the Long Vacation in summer, to Cambridge butchers. Until the early 1930s it was usual to see large bowls of this dripping displayed for sale at a price of about sixpence or eightpence a pound. As well as being used in home cooking it provided, in poorer households, a cheap substitute for butter.

Puddings, pies and dumplings containing blackbirds, larks or sparrows were eaten in the past in many Cambridgeshire villages when the snaring of these birds was a common practice. In the days of great poverty, especially in the Fens, many households relied on hares and pheasants, often illegally obtained by poaching, to provide an addition to their meagre diet.

Cambridgeshire is not noted for any particular local form of pudding. Many housewives, however, made and still make their own cheesecakes with the local milk cheese, which, after being well beaten together with egg, butter, sugar, lemon peel and juice and with the addition of currants, is then baked in pastry cases.

Yorkshire Pudding is, in many Cambridgeshire homes, eaten, with a good gravy, as a separate course before the meat and vegetables are served. Though many housewives now bake the pudding in its own separate tin or fireproof dish, the old method was to bake it under the joint, which, when almost cooked, was removed from the tin, from which some of the excess dripping was then poured off. The pudding batter of eggs, flour and milk was then poured into the tin and a trivet inserted on to which the meat was replaced.

Some Colleges have become associated with certain dishes some of which were probably originally prepared according to favourite recipes of College cooks, while others have, from time to time, been introduced by dons or Fellows. Trinity and Corpus Christi Colleges, for example, have since the last century become noted for their *crème brûlée*, although this sweet by no means belongs to Cambridge

alone. It has long been a popular delicacy in many English households and directions for its making appear in numerous old cookery books, among them Elizabeth Raffald's *The Experienced English Housekeeper*, first published in 1709. Her recipe for *Burnt Cream*, as it was formerly more usually named, is:

Boil a pint of cream with sugar and a little lemon peel shred fine; then beat the yolks of six and the whites of four eggs separately; when your cream is cooled put in your eggs, with a spoonful of orange-flower water, and one of fine flour; keep stirring it till it is thick; put it into a dish; when it is cold sift a quarter of a pound of sugar all over, hold a hot salamander¹ over it till it is very brown and looks like a glass plate put over your cream.

All kinds of fruits and flowers and such vegetables as parsnips, potatoes, etc., were made into wines and cordials by many Cambridge-shire housewives. Wine-making, indeed, is still popular and there is in Cambridge a flourishing association whose members are all enthusiastic makers of wines. Mead is still brewed by some bee-keepers, though to a lesser extent than formerly, when most country gardens had a few hives of bees.

W. H. Barrett recalls that when he was a boy in the 1890s large quantities of mead were made by Fen housewives, especially when the hemp, then widely grown, was in flower. Old Fenmen, however, voted this mead to be too weak for their tastes and preferred that made with the honey produced by wild bees. This used to be collected three times during the year, the first when the dandelions were in flower, the second when wild mint was in bloom and the third when the bees had been working on the giant thistles which, it was claimed, gave a musk-like flavour to the honey.

Mr Barrett's grandmother, like most of her mid-nineteenth-century Fenland contemporaries, used for making the wild honey mead a special yeast obtained by reducing to pulp in a large basin an apple, a small turnip and a handful of currants. To the pulp was then added a gill of water and four tablespoonfuls of honey. In a few days' time a froth would appear, which was skimmed off and used to ferment the mead, of which the ingredients were four pints of water to each quart of honey. In the autumn the brews made from the three types of wild honey were mixed together in a wooden cask and some more of the special yeast was added, together with some root ginger

¹ *Salamander*: an oval or circular iron plate with a long handle with a hole bored midway along its length for insertion into an upright stand. The plate was heated and the dish to be browned was placed beneath it. A makeshift salamander could be made by heating a kitchen shovel and holding this over the dish. Today electrically heated salamanders are obtainable.

and four egg-shells, the last named ingredient helping to produce a clear liquid. As fermentation proceeded the resulting scum was removed and when no more appeared the mead was bottled.

The traditional wines served at christenings, weddings and funerals in the Littleport Fens in W. H. Barrett's youth were, respectively, cowslip, rhubarb and elderberry. He remembers that he once attended the wedding of a young woman in Brandon Creek. After the ceremony the health of the newly married couple was drunk in rhubarb wine, but shortly before midnight, when the celebrations were still in full swing, the services of the local midwife were urgently required by the bride, so bottles of homemade cowslip wine were produced. Hardly had the guests begun to drink these, however, when it was announced that the baby had been born dead, so the cowslip wine was hastily removed and replaced with elderberry.

Each Cambridgeshire housewife had, and has still, her own tried and favourite recipe for making various wines. A Thorney farmer's wife, for example, who died early in this century, always made her gooseberry wine according to the following method:

Take 60 lb. of unripe gooseberries and bruise and crush till all are broken. Pour over the fruit 60 quarts of boiled water (cold) and let it stand 3 days, stirring well every day, then strain and to each gallon of juice put 3 lb. of loaf sugar. When the sugar is dissolved put the wine into a cask with 1 quart of brandy to every 5 gallons, put an ounce of isinglass into a muslin bag and suspend from the bung hole and bung down. Let it stand six months. The bottles must be corked down as tightly as possible with wire or string when the wine is put into them.

Nettle Beer was another favourite home-made drink for use in summer; it was claimed to be both cooling and health-giving. One Cambridge family recipe for its making was:

Boil 2 lb. of young nettles for 20 minutes in a gallon of water, then strain into an earthenware bowl and stir in a pound of demerara sugar, an ounce of cream of tartar and the juice and rind of two lemons. When the mixture has cooled add an ounce of yeast, cover the bowl with a cloth and put it in a warm place for three days. Strain the beer into bottles, wire the corks down very firmly. The beer can be drunk after it has been kept for one week.

Such old English, and still popular, drinks as punch,¹ mulled² ale and mulled wines, though by no means peculiar to Cambridgeshire,

¹ *Punch*: a beverage now usually composed of wine or spirits mixed with hot water or milk and flavoured with sugar, lemons and some spice or cordial. Usually qualified as *brandy, gin, rum, whisky*, etc., punch. *O.E.D.*

² *Mull*: to make (wine, beer, etc.) into a hot drink with the addition of sugar, spices, beaten yolk of egg, etc.

nevertheless have certain traditional associations with the county and, more especially, with the University. The mulled port, for example, served to the Assize Judge when he arrives at his lodgings in Trinity College has already been mentioned under *University Customs*.

It was the custom of serving such drinks at the Christmas festivities in the Colleges which led, probably, to Cambridge giving its name to a punch known generally as Cambridge Milk Punch. Kettner's *Book of the Table*, published in 1877, speaks disparagingly of it, preferring the Oxford Punch prepared with water:

The Cambridge milk punch is scarcely worthy of the great University. It is punch made without water but with hot milk instead and with the addition of one or two beaten eggs.

A traditional recipe¹ for Cambridge Milk Punch is:

Throw into two quarts of new milk the very thinly-pared rind of a fine lemon, and half a pound of good sugar in lumps; bring it slowly to the boil, take out the lemon-rind, draw it from the fire, and quickly stir in a couple of well-whisked eggs which have been mixed with less than half a pint of cold milk, and strained through a sieve; the milk must not of course be allowed to boil after these are mixed with it. Add gradually a pint of rum, and half a pint of brandy; mill the punch to a froth, and serve it immediately with quite warm glasses. At the University the lemon-rind is usually omitted, but it is a great improvement to the flavour of the beverage. The sugar and spirit can be otherwise apportioned to the taste. . . .

Hot spiced port was known as *Bishop* in the eighteenth century and was popular enough in the University to be defined in the *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam* as

port wine made copiously potable by being mulled and burnt with the *addenda* of roasted lemons all bristling like angry hedgehogs (studded with cloves). . . .

'Cambridge', wrote the compilers of the same book, 'has long been celebrated for its Ale; we have ourselves quaffed no small quantities of this inspiring beverage.' The Colleges formerly had their own brewhouses, while in farmhouses and homes throughout the county ales and beers were brewed for domestic use in addition to those produced in the larger breweries of Cambridgeshire.

Many housewives still mix their Christmas puddings with strong beer and *Stingo*, formerly brewed in Cambridge, was much used locally for this purpose. It was usual to see in many public houses, early in December, notices advertising that it was procurable.

Many publicans, too, brewed their own beers, one of the last to do

¹ Eliza Acton: *Modern Cookery for Private Families* ed. 1856, p. 581.

so being the landlord of the Jolly Brewers at Milton, where the practice continued until the 1940s. At Weston Colville the last brew of harvest beer was made in 1946 in the brewhouse in Church End. The recipe used was: 6 gallons of water, 2 bushels of malt, 2 lb. of hops. The water was boiled in a large copper then transferred to the mash tub and left to cool for one hour. The malt was then added and the mixture closely covered so that it retained its heat for seven hours, after which it was strained and returned to the copper to be boiled, with the hops, for three hours. The liquid was then strained off and, after yeast, previously mixed with a little warm milk, had been added, was left for three days before being placed into casks. These ingredients made 36 gallons of beer.¹

In the village of Over there was still, as late as 1909, an Ale Conner in office. His duty was to taste the ale in all the public houses to ensure that it was up to the required standard. Payment for this service was 1s. on appointment.

The high price of tea in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries prohibited its consumption in poorer households in Cambridgeshire, as in the rest of the country. From the 1860s, when the price fell to 2s. to 2s. 6d. a pound more people were able to afford it. Members of Wimpole Women's Institute have recalled that cottagers sweetened the beverage with the cheapest sugar, which was brown and sticky and full of small black lumps. The approved method of tea-drinking was to put a spoonful of sugar in the mouth and then swallow the tea in gulps.

Packets of tea were often offered as prizes at village sports, Fen skating matches and other festivities. Gunpowder tea² was especially popular and a pound of this, with a pair of shoes, formed the first prize in a young lads' race at the sports held in Cambridge in 1838 to celebrate the coronation of Queen Victoria. The public notice³ advertising the sports facetiously describes the tea as *Souchongacetameranchoorigdumfefafumrumpeecoeannuscoronatiomirabilis-flavoured*.

Among the family papers of the Wale family of Shelford which were discovered in a pantry in 1853 and published in 1883 under the title of *My Grandfather's Pocket-Book* is a note on the general diet of farm labourers in the village in the eighteenth century. It begins with the dishes served at the annual harvest dinner in 1767 (beans and pork and bacon boiled) and continues:

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institute, 1954.

² *Gunpowder Tea*: a fine kind of green tea, each leaf of which is rolled up into a pellet. *O.E.D.*

³ Now in the Cambridge Folk Museum.

as they (i.e. the labourers) are fond of it they'll eat cold beans and cold pork or bacon for supper, they'll sometimes eat milk for breakfast or supper and sometimes Toast and ale and sugar; and for change they make posset¹ by setting on a kettle of milk and put ale, sugar and white bread to it; when apples and plumbs are cheap (they make) apple and plumb puddings, also rice, rice puddings or milk.

Almond Butter the Cambridge Way is one of the recipes given in John Nott's *Cooks' and Confectioners' Dictionary* of 1725. This butter was probably associated with Cambridge by way of the University. It was made with well-pounded almonds, milk, cream and egg yolks all gently heated together until they were of a thick, soft consistency. The mixture was then strained and hung up in a bag to allow the whey from the milk to drain away, after which fine sugar and rose water were beaten into the butter.

¹ *Posset*: a drink composed of hot milk curdled with ale, wine or other liquor, often with sugar, spices, etc.; formerly much used as a delicacy, and as a remedy for colds, etc. *O.E.D.*

APPENDIX III

Sayings, Proverbs and Rhymes

Sayings about Places

As mean as Cottenham

This saying probably stems from the refusal by the village in c. 1750 to accept the highway from Cambridge to Ely.

Balsham, where they do three days' washing for nothing

Quy, where they bury all the deaf and dumb people

Wilbraham, where the ducks come from

Wilbraham, where they ring only one bell for a wedding and all the bells for a funeral

Hungry 'Ardick (Hardwick)

Greedy Toft

Hang poor Cawcott (Caldecote) in the loft.

A variant of the above was supplied in 1961 by D. H. Dickerson of Harlton:

Hungry Hardwick,

Greedy Toft,

Hang-up Kingston,

Cawcott 'loft.

Some following lines could not be remembered.

Hardwick and Toft appear in the following list, well-known still to many Cambridgeshire people, of villages which lie roughly in a circle to the south and south-west of Cambridge:

Hungry Hardwick,

Greedy Toft,

Dirty Duxer (Duxford),

Silly Panser (Pampisford),

Proud Sawston,

Long Whitser (Whittlesford)

Swaggering Bourn,

Itchy, lousy Cummerton (Comberton).

Two variants of the last line are 'little, lousy Comberton' and 'nitty, lousy Comberton'.

High Street for pride and poverty,
Low Street for muck and money,

is a saying still current in Burwell to distinguish, originally, the inhabitants of these two districts of the town.

As dull as Cambridge in the Long

This saying was current until early in the present century. It described the quietness of the town, in the days before the modern invasion by summer tourists, during the Long Vacation when the undergraduates were away. Until the closing years of the last century several tailors' and outfitters' shops in the centre of Cambridge closed for the month of August, reopening in September for the harvest trade.

Cambridge is built on seven hills

The 'hills' of Cambridge are Market Hill, Senate House Hill, Pound Hill, Castle Hill, St Andrew's Hill, Peas Hill and Honey Hill. Of these only Castle Hill and Honey Hill are now recognisably slopes. The relatively higher ground represented by the other hills, on which settlement was made in early times, has disappeared with the gradual levelling of the lower and more swampy parts surrounding it to provide foundations for the buildings needed by the growing town.

Reach had seven churches

The village has never possessed more than one church, but the saying was, doubtless, coined to emphasise the importance of Reach in former times. Until 1650 sea-going vessels were able to reach the village, a port in Roman times, by means of the artificial channel, Reach Lode, which joins Burwell Lode before entering the Cam. When Reach Fair was granted to the burgesses of Cambridge by King John in c. 1200 the village was already a thriving trading centre. Until early in this century barges continued to bring wine, wood, coal, peat and other commodities to Reach.

If you walk round Reach Church seven times the Devil will appear

The Devil's Dyke, the great earthwork raised, probably, in the fifth or sixth century, runs along a seven-mile course from Wood-ditton across Newmarket Heath to the fen at Reach. This fact may have given rise to the saying.

Walk seven times round Soldiers' Hill at Denny and you'll hear the monks sing

A small cell of the Benedictine monastery of Ely was established at Denny, near Waterbeach, soon after 1160. In the thirteenth century the monastery passed to the Knights Templars and following their dissolution the Manor was granted to the Countess of Pembroke in 1327. She founded there a community of Minoresses of St Clare, nuns of the Second Order of St Francis, who were joined in 1351 by a community of the same Order from Waterbeach. The Abbey ruins have recently been restored.

Ely Cathedral was built with eels

The importance of eels in the early economy of the Fens was very great. Rents and debts were paid and land was sold in 'sticks' of twenty-five eels and the Domesday recorders carefully noted the value of the eels in Fenland parishes. Wisbech, for example, was worth 32,000 eels *per annum*, Doddington 27,150, Stuntney 24,000 and Littleport 17,000. For the privilege of quarrying stone at Barnack, near Peterborough, for the building of their monastery, the Ely monks paid 4,000 eels a year. This gave rise to the saying that the Cathedral was built with eels.

The Fitzwilliam Museum Lions

Generations of Cambridge children, certainly until the 1950s, have been told what happens when the stone lions on either side of the entrance to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Trumpington Street hear the clock of the Catholic church strike twelve. According to the various versions of the tale, the lions either roar, or come down from their plinths, or walk down the steps into the street to drink from the 'run'.¹ A 72-year-old Cambridge man said in 1966 that, as a child, he was told that the lions, when they heard midnight strike, went inside the Museum.

Ditton Docks

Before the coming of the railway to Cambridge in 1845 goods from the surrounding countryside and from abroad were brought to the town by river. Landing-stages, known as *hithes*, existed in riverside villages for the loading and unloading of goods, and there was a line of hithes in Cambridge between Magdalene Bridge and the Newnham

¹ Streams running down the gutters in Trumpington Street from the brook which flows from the Nine Wells in Shelford and ends at the corner of Trumpington Road and Lensfield Road. Streams formerly ran along Lensfield Road and on the east side of Regent Street to the corner of St Andrew's Street.

Mill Pool. At Ditton the stage acquired the somewhat grand name—still known to elderly Cambridge people—of Ditton Docks, while the one at Horningsea was often called Horningsea Pier.

The Golden Pineapple

In 1610 a watercourse, known as the Cambridge New River, was constructed to bring water from south of Cambridge to the conduit head, at the corner of Trumpington Road and Lensfield Road, and thence into the King's Ditch¹ at the junction of Trumpington Street and Pembroke Street. The scheme was paid for jointly by the town and University, though endowments for its upkeep were later bequeathed by Thomas Hobson, the carrier, who died in 1630, and by Samuel Potto, who died in 1632.

In 1614 drinking water was piped from the conduit head to a new fountain erected on the Market Hill. This fountain came to be called Hobson's Conduit or Fountain, because the original inscription tablet² on it stated that the cost was entirely borne by the carrier. The fountain was removed in 1856 from Market Hill to its present site at the head of the conduit in Trumpington Road. It is a stone structure, hexagonal in shape and surmounted by a gilded stone finial in the shape of a pineapple.³

S. P. Widnall recorded⁴ that when the fountain stood on Market Hill any person asking another to treat him to a drink would be told: 'You can go to the Golden Pineapple on Market Hill and get a quart and set it up to me.' If the person so informed was a stranger to Cambridge he would hopefully make his way to the 'inn', only to find that he could, indeed, get plenty to drink there, but nothing stronger than the water which in those days ran continuously from several spouts on the conduit.

¹ This watercourse, made on the orders of Henry III, began at the Mill Pool in Newnham and rejoined the river just above Jesus Green. Its course marked a large part of the boundary of medieval Cambridge. With the growth of the town the Ditch gradually became filled in.

² This tablet, together with another recording Potto's gift and a legacy bequeathed in 1805 by Joseph Werrill, were revealed in 1966 when the Conduit was restored. They are now in the Cambridge Folk Museum. The tablets had been covered by two later ones; of these one recorded the removal of the Conduit from Market Hill, the other was inscribed: *Thomas Hobson Carrier between Cambridge & London, a great benefactor to this University Town. Died January 1st 1630 in the 86 year of his age.*

³ This is described in *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments of the City of Cambridge* (Royal Commission on Hist. Monuments of Eng., 1959, p. 308) as a *fir-cone finial*.

⁴ S. P. Widnall: *A Gossiping Stroll through the Streets of Cambridge*, 1892, p. 10.

Sayings about People—Known and Unknown

All round Will's mother's

This expression, also current in Norfolk, is used to describe someone who takes a long time to reach the point of a narrative: e.g. *He went all round Will's mother's to tell us*. The phrase is also used of distances: e.g. *I had to go all round Will's mother's to get there*.

An expression, still used by some elderly Cambridge people, with the same meaning is *All round the candlestick*.¹

Johnny Broom

'Look where you're going, Johnny Broom', a 78-year old Cambridge man was heard, in 1950, to say to a small boy who, running along the street, had nearly knocked him over. When questioned, the old man said that he had always called small boys Johnny Broom, as his father had done, though he did not know why.

At the end of the last century a pipe-maker in the Barnwell district of Cambridge used to allow boys, on Saturday mornings, to make at his pipe-works miniature clay pipes which were known as *Johnny Broom pipes*.²

To the question 'who did, or said, that?'—especially if asked by an inquisitive child—the answer often given by Cambridge people until early in this century was: '*Old Fubbs of Ditton*'; or '*Miles's boy*' or '*Charlie Hines*'. The first two characters have not so far been identified, but Charlie Hines was an old man who used to come to Cambridge from Waterbeach on Saturdays with watercress for sale.

Borough Boys

The name of *Borough Boy* is still known, though not now often used, of anyone born in the Castle End district of Cambridge, the oldest inhabited part of Cambridge formerly known as the Borough. Until 1912 there was a public house called The Borough Boy at No. 19 Northampton Street.

Hobson's choice

The most famous of Cambridgeshire expressions is that of *Hobson's choice*, which is used to indicate that, in fact, there is no choice at all.

¹ A saying, still in use and with a similar meaning, is *All over the auction*. It is used especially when speaking of things which are in disorder.

² These pipes were used by children for blowing soap-and-water bubbles. One of them is in the Folk Museum.

Thomas Hobson (1545–1630), the Cambridge carrier and livery stable proprietor, insisted that when his horses were taken out on hire they be let out in strict rotation so that all were equally rested and exercised. Thus no one was allowed to hire a particular animal—it was Hobson's choice or none.

Royston horses and Cambridge Masters of Arts

The proverb, still known in Cambridge in the mid-nineteenth century¹ *A Royston horse and a Cambridge Master of Arts will give way to no one* is found in a letter of William Zoon written to George Bruin in his *Theatre of Cities*.² Royston sent a great deal of malt up to London and the heavy horses which drew the drays refused to give way to other traffic on the road. Cambridge dons had the reputation of demanding, and getting, respect from lesser citizens who gave way to them in the streets, allowing the University men to walk on the inner side of the path.

Miscellaneous Sayings

Miss H. Gawthrop of Wimbledon, who was born in Cambridge, recalled in 1962 that an expression she often heard used, in the first decade of this century, in reply to an inquiry as to where something or some person was to be found was *Nobb's Creek, where the mice walk on tiptoes to save their heels*.

In 1949 a woman living in Haslingfield reported that she heard a villager, who was speaking of a man who had recently died in the village, say: '*May every hair on his head be a lighted candle.*'

It was recorded in 1936³ that a Cambridge woman, referring to the death of a well-known local chemist, used the expression: '*I should think they'll miss every hair on his head.*'

A stallholder on Cambridge market was overheard to say in 1959, in reply to a customer's inquiry as to the whereabouts of her daughter: 'Oh, she *went foreign* last year.' The daughter, it appeared, had

¹ It is referred to, for example, by Prof. Pryme in his *Autobiographical Recollections*, and by E. Everett in *On the Cam*, as current in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

² The proverb is quoted by Thomas Fuller in *The History of the Worthies of England*, ed. P. A. Nuttall, 1840, I, 226. The *Theatre of Cities* or *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, by George Braun, Braunius, or Bruin, and Francis Hogenburg, was published in Cologne, 1575. A translation of the account of Cambridge sent by William Soone or Zoone to Braun, appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of May 1776, p. 201.

³ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

emigrated with her husband and family to Canada. *To go foreign* is not infrequently used by Cambridgeshire people to indicate a move to another part of England.

An expression current in the Newmarket Road area of Cambridge until the 1920s and used to describe a bad workman was: *He's as much good as a whore at a christening.*

From the same district has been recorded, again as current until the 1920s, two sayings used of people in debt: *He's got in old Tom's ribs for £5*, and *He's got a dog chained up with old Tom for £5*. Also often heard in the Newmarket Road district to describe a simple-minded person was the saying: *He's daft, just like the man who lifted his pig on to the wall to watch the Salvation Army go by.*

Natives of Cambridge are very much given to using the words *mine*, *yours*, *his*, etc., to indicate my house, your house, his house, saying, for example, *I'll come to yours*, *we'll meet at mine* or *I was at hers last week.*

Cucumber time was the phrase used by Edward Case¹ of Cambridge in the 1840s to denote the Long Vacation.

A Cambridge man recalled in 1950 that, in his childhood in the first ten years of this century he often heard the saying *It's neither pillow nor bolster with me* used to express the speaker's complete indifference.

In 1960 a man in a public house in Sawston was heard to say to his companion, with reference to how tall the latter's small son was growing: *'Your young Paul must have some good dung in his boots; he's bigger now than our Derek.'*

An expression in current Cambridgeshire use to indicate manual dexterity is: *He's a dab hand* at making rugs. Lack of such nimble-fingeredness is described by such adjectives as: *I'm not very gain* at untying knots; or *Don't be so cack-handed*. This last epithet is also used of anyone who is left-handed or, sometimes, of objects. A cupboard door, for example, which is hung so that it opens the wrong way is often said to be *cack-handed*.

A person who shows a disinclination to eat is said by many elderly people to *plinge* at his food. The word *pingling* has been heard used to describe someone who is not in the best of health. A 70-year-old Cambridge woman, asked in 1966 how her older sister, who had recently returned from hospital, was, replied: *'Oh, she's still pingling, though she's better than she was.'* Her following conversation clearly showed that she had used the word with the meaning of *only fairly well.*

¹ *Memoirs of a King's College Chorister*, 1899.

Many Cambridgeshire mothers, when asked by their children 'What is there for dinner?' still reply '*Bread and pullet*' with the meaning of 'Don't be inquisitive; wait and see.' Because the phrase was so often used by their mothers or grandmothers with the obvious intention of refusing to answer accurately the question, many now middle-aged people in the county have said they thought, as children, that the phrase was really: 'Bread, and pull it.' To older people, however, *bread and pullet* means dry bread. The expression dates, perhaps, to the times of great poverty in the last century when it was probably used, semi-humorously, to indicate that dry bread was really all there was to eat.

A 60-year-old carpenter who was putting up some shelves in 1959 was heard to say, when he was using his spirit level to discover whether a piece of wood was level: 'There, I knew it was *on the sosh*.' When questioned he said that he had been born and had lived for the first twenty-five years of his life in Whittlesey, and that his father and uncle, also carpenters, had always used that expression of anything that was on the slant.

Fenland Sayings, Proverbs, etc.

The term *Yellow Belly* is still applied to a native of the Cambridgeshire Fens, although, in the eighteenth¹ century and probably earlier, it seems to have been used to denote a Lincolnshire Fenman. In 1957 Mr T. W. Bagshawe recorded from the landlady of the Black Horse at Amberley in Sussex the information that women of that neighbourhood were also called Yellow Bellies because of the reputation they had of 'tucking up their skirts and warming their bodies against the peat fire'. The peat smoke was said to give a yellow tinge to the skin. Although peat was so widely used for fuel in the Cambridgeshire Fens, no information has been collected to show that the use of the term Yellow Belly resulted from this.

Natives of the Cambridgeshire Fens were for long supposed to have web feet because of the watery nature of the land in which they lived. The belief is still referred to. Again it is interesting that the Amberley people were also called 'Web Feet' because they lived near the swampy Wild Brooks.

The best-known nickname, still applied to Cambridgeshire Fen dwellers, is that of *Fen Tigers*. They are said to have acquired the

¹ *Yellow Belly*: a native of the Fens of Lincolnshire; an allusion to the eels caught there. Grose: *Dict. Vulgar Tongue*, ed. 3, 1796.

name in the seventeenth century through their fierce opposition to the drainage workers who, by turning the old wildfowling and fishing-grounds into dry land, were declared to be robbing the Fenmen of their means of gaining a livelihood. The typical Fen Tiger of tradition was a proudly independent man who preferred working at piece rate—being paid for each job—to being employed regularly by anyone whom he would have to call his master. He dressed in fustian¹ jacket, moleskin trousers and cap, could spend a whole evening drinking in the public house and still be able to make his way home unaided, and was closely knit by ties of loyalty to his fellow Tigers.

Another type of Fenmen comprised the *Fen Slodgers*. These were the men who worked at fishing and wildfowling and at looking after the numerous flocks of geese which were reared in the Fens for food and feathers. The birds were plucked four or five times a year to provide feathers for pen-making before the introduction of the steel pen.

The Slodgers were, by tradition, men of a quiet and placid disposition who wore smocks and tended to be despised by the Tigers.

Fenmen were also known as *Cambridgeshire Camels*, a name they acquired, it is thought, through their practice of walking on stilts which enabled them to overlook the tall reeds and rushes of the undrained Fens.

W. H. Barrett can recall many expressions and proverbial sayings current in his youth in the 1890s in the Fens between Littleport and Ely. Among these are:

Clanging gates, nagging women and mad bulls all need shutting up.

A shilling, a shut-knife and a piece of string
Will provide a man with anything.

A rich man's sport, a poor man's crime—
A dying pheasant has had its time.

Dry bread is hard but it's harder where there's none.

A hoss in the dyke and a drunken man are both alike
(i.e. helpless)

God made bees, bees make honey,
Labourers do the work and farmers get the money.

Littleport Feast and Ely Fair
Have been the ruin of many a pair.

A smoking chimney is better than no fire.

¹ *Fustian*: derived from *Fostat*, a suburb of Cairo whence the stuff first came. Formerly, a coarse cloth made of cotton and flax. Now, a thick, twilled cotton cloth with a short pile or nap, usually dyed a dark colour. *O.E.D.*

Maiden's garter, fenmen's charter,¹
 Neighbours' boats, fishermen's floats,
 Fires a-glowing, reaper mowing,
 Are never interfered with.

A *padlock dinner* was the name given to a cold meal left for her husband by a wife who was away for the day.

All steam and suds was the name for the dinners served on Mondays—that is on washdays.

He's gone on the ten-day trip. This was said of a drowned man, ten days being reckoned as the time it took for a body to float downriver from Cambridge to Littleport.

The traditional mistrust of the clergy, so much a characteristic of Fen dwellers, is reflected in the following *Fen Version of the Parson's Creed* which W. H. Barrett often heard recited:

Money, oh money, thy praises I sing,
 Thou art my saviour, my lord and my king;
 'Tis for thee that I preach, for thee that I pray
 And give praises to God three times a day.

The following lines were well known in the Littleport Fens in the last century. They refer to the execution at Ely in 1816 of five men after riots in Littleport in protest against the high food prices and the unemployment which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The Bishop of Ely, responsible for law and order in the Isle of Ely, applied for military aid to quell the rioters at whose subsequent trial two High Court Judges assisted the Bishop's Judge. In addition to the five men executed, six were transported, five for life and one for fourteen years, while ten were sentenced to a year's imprisonment in Ely gaol.

A starving crowd, singing loud
 For higher pay, rued the day
 When a Bishop's cope, a hangman's rope
 And a butcher's cart² all played their part
 As those Littleport men saw the last of the fen
 From that knacker's yard in Ely.
 Until book and bell are sold in Hell
 Fenmen will never forget or forgive.

¹ By this may be meant the general, unwritten code of behaviour observed by old-time Fenmen: loyalty, combined mistrust of strangers, wealthy landowners, the Church, etc. It may refer to the code of Fen laws, first drawn up in 1548 and in force until Enclosure. These laws related to the keeping of geese, the pasturing of cattle (which had to be marked with the brand of each parish), the cutting of turf for fuel, etc.

² No one would provide transport for the condemned men to the place of execution. Finally a butcher yielded to the temptation of a substantial bribe for the loan of his cart.

Some Cambridgeshire Rhyming Verses

There was a little man where a little river ran,
 And he had a little farm and a little dairy, ho.
 He had a little plough and a little dappled cow
 Which he often called his pretty little treasure, ho.
 And his dog he called Fydell, for it loved its master well,
 And he had a little pony for his pleasure, ho.
 In a sty not very big he had a pretty little pig
 Which he often called his little piggy treasure, ho.
 Once a little maiden ran with a pretty little can,
 Went a-milking when the morning sun was gleaming, ho.
 She said, 'I don't know how' and stumbled o'er the plough,
 And the cow was quite astonished at her screaming, ho.
 The little maid cried out in pain
 As the milk ran o'er the plain.
 The little pig ran grunting after it so gaily, ho;
 While the little dog behind for a game was much inclined,
 So he pulled back little piggy by his taily, ho.
 Such a clatter now began which alarmed the little man
 Who came capering from out his little stable, ho.
 Pony trod on doggie's toe, doggie snapped at piggy's nose
 Which only made the matter worse than ever, ho.¹

The following lines were heard in 1952 being recited, for the entertainment of a small boy, by a woman who learned them in c. 1900 from her uncle, who was born in Cambridge in 1879:

Jack the Ripper²

Have you seen old Jack the Ripper?
 Can you tell me who he is?
 If you see him you must take away his knife
 And give it to the women,
 Put it in their pretty fists,
 Then I wouldn't give him twopence for his life.

Old Mother Lee³

Old Mother Lee—I'll let the beauty see:
 I'll give her hot boiled nettles,
 Mottled soap, and boil the lot;
 I'll get a great big funnel
 And pour it in her guzzle
 And make the varmint drink it boiling hot.

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² The notorious London murderer of the 1890s.

³ The fortune-tellers who attend yearly at the Cambridge and Ely Fairs all have notices on their caravans claiming that the owner of each is 'the only real descendant of Gipsy Lee'.

Our Village Mill

Above our old village there rises a hill
And right on the top is a tall wooden mill.
The sails, when the winds blow, go merrily round,
And there all the villagers' gleanings are ground.
The miller uprises full early each morn
And fills up the hoppers with ripe golden corn.
Then round goes the mill and grinds it with power
Till nothing remains but brown bran and white flour.
Blow, winds, blow,
That the mill may go,
Then the jolly miller will grind our corn.
Soon the baker will take it
And into bread bake it,
And bring us new loaves
In the early morn.

Miss Frances Graves, aged 86, wrote in September 1968, from Petersfield Hospital in Huntingdon, that her Cottenham-born grandfather used to recite to her the nicknames of several Cambridge-shire villages. She quoted those given on page 376 and recalled, in addition:

Barton bull-dogs,
Barrington bears,
Haslingfield worry-cats,
Harlton catch hares;
Sutton—good mutton,
Ely—good beef,
Haddenham—a pretty town,
Wilburton—a thief

She can remember, too, that Cottenham men were often called *Mug-huggers*, from their habit of sitting, as they drank their beer, on forms set up round a yard into which calves were run, behind one of the village inns.

APPENDIX IV

Miscellaneous Beliefs and Customs

Crossing Thumbs for Luck

'Keep your fingers crossed' is a saying common to many parts of England to express hope that some venture will have a successful outcome or a misfortune be averted. The action is generally performed by placing the second finger of one or both hands over the first. In 1937, however, a woman born in Cambridge in c. 1882, when asked if any members of her family were suffering from the influenza epidemic then occurring in the town, replied, 'No, but I must cross my thumbs', and immediately did so.¹

Saying Good-bye

A belief that it is unlucky to say good-bye to anyone was recorded² in 1937:

On Coronation Day, in the evening, I was in my landlord's kitchen talking over the festivities. Gladys, his young niece, was also there but she had to go out after a while. I said good-bye to her but she did not answer. Her old grandmother chuckled: 'Yes,' she said, 'Gladys takes after her old grandfather. You know, they say if you don't say it it means you'll come back again safely.'

Returning for a Forgotten Object

A practice followed by the same Cambridge family whenever they returned to fetch some object which had been forgotten was recorded³ in 1937:

The other day I returned to my room for a notebook I had forgotten. I remarked to my landlady, who was dusting the room, that I had come back for the book although I believed it was considered unlucky to do

¹ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

so. She said it would be all right if I sat down on the first chair I came to for a minute. So I sat down on a chair but she said it would be unlucky all the same as it was not the chair nearest the door.

A 73-year-old Grantchester woman said in 1966 that if ever she has to return to the house or go into another room to fetch anything she has forgotten she always sits down on the chair nearest the door and counts up to ten. 'The counting is most important if you want good luck.'

Pins

Many Cambridgeshire people still believe that it is lucky to pick up a single pin which has been dropped accidentally by someone else. The rhyme is still quoted:

See a pin and pick it up
Then you'll have a year's good luck.

A Cambridge woman said in 1959 that when she was a child in c. 1902 she was one day making some chairs for her doll's house, using horse chestnuts for the seats and pins for the legs and backs. Her mother saw that among the pins she was using was a black one and this she immediately removed and threw into the fire, telling the child that it was 'very unlucky to use black pins'. When, until the late 1920s, papers stuck with a number of pins were often given in drapers' shops in lieu of a farthing change, the same mother, the daughter recalled, always refused to accept the pins if they were black ones.

The custom of giving a woman, before the birth of a child, a special pincushion was observed in Cambridgeshire in the last century. Some of these maternity pincushions¹ are now in the Cambridge Folk Museum. Covered with white muslin and edged with narrow lace, they have pins stuck into them to form such messages as:

Welcome Little Stranger

or

May God Preserve Them Both From Danger.

The magical associations of pins—their uses in working spells, etc., were widespread—probably led to the offering of the gifts. Certainly their receivers do not seem to have been able to bear to remove and use the pins so carefully inserted into the cushions.

A 73-year-old Oakington woman said in 1965 that she was always

¹ Plate 75.

pleased to receive a gift of *eggs* because she had always believed, having been told so as a child, that they brought good luck.

'If you pick up a *glove* which someone has accidentally dropped,' said a Wilburton woman, aged 77, in 1950, 'it means you will soon be invited to a wedding or hear of a wedding in the family.'

'My old mother, who was born in Hildersham in 1870, always told me that if you picked up a *knife* which had fallen on the floor, perhaps when you're washing up or laying the table, a man would soon be coming to see you.'¹

In 1960 a Cambridge woman, in her seventies, said that 'lots of Cambridge people used to say that if anyone put the teapot on the table and forgot to put the lid on then a stranger would soon be coming to the house. Again, if anyone was laying a table for a meal and accidentally put two spoons on to a saucer someone close to them was soon going to be married.'

Many middle-aged Cambridge people can remember that when *tea leaves* were larger² than those now more usually sold, so that strainers were less often used when pouring tea, a leaf—referred to as a *Stranger*—often floated to the top of the cup. If this leaf was removed, placed on the back of one hand and then struck with the back of the other while the days of the week were recited, the day being named when the tea leaf adhered to the back of the striking hand was the one on which the visit of a stranger could be expected.

Shoe-wearing Belief

From a woman born in Lode in the 1890s was recorded³ in 1937 the following rhyme concerning the ways in which shoes can be worn down by their wearers:

Wear it at the ball—live and spend all;
Wear it at the heel—spend a good deal;
Wear it at the side—live and thrive.

Church Porch Belief

S. P. Widnall recorded in his *History of Grantchester*, which he printed on his own private press in 1875:

A curious notion prevailed here some years ago. If any of the parishioners, for any cause, had no home, they could take up residence in the

¹ Recorded in 1950.

² These large tea leaves, which often remained at the bottom of the cup when the tea had been drunk, enabled people to 'tell fortunes'—for amusement or seriously—by the shapes, patterns, etc., formed by the leaves.

³ Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

Church porch, when the parish authorities were bound to find them a home. About 40 years ago a man with his wife and family adopted this means, and on the congregation going to church on Sunday morning, they found the porch thus occupied, a curtain being hung across the entrance. Before the next Sunday a home was found for them.

Selling a Wife

The sale of a wife by auction in Swaffham Bulbeck was recorded¹ in 1933 as having taken place 'some years ago' and to be 'still remembered by some people'.

One November day two tinkers arrived in the village and in the afternoon notices were circulated announcing that a public auction would take place at seven o'clock that evening at the Royal Oak inn. Opening the proceedings the auctioneer, having announced that he had to offer 'a most desirable Lot', ordered his assistant to 'bring in the article and stand her on that footstool so that would-be buyers get a good look at her'.

The woman was thereupon led into the room with a halter round her neck and the auctioneer began a detailed description of her unprepossessing appearance—red nose, thick lips, bent back, receding chin and eyes of which one 'looks straight at you, the other wanders up to the North'.

Bidding began at sixpence and the woman was finally sold for half a crown to the companion of the tinker who was selling her.

A Test of a Criminal

Dr Charles Lucas recorded² in 1933 that it was once the custom in the Burwell Fens to test anyone suspected of having committed a crime by requiring him to try to 'spit a sixpence'. If he could do this his innocence was proved.

Broom Custom

In the same district it was customary, in the last century, for a man to hang a broom out of his window, if his wife was away on holiday for a period, as a sign that he wished his friends to come and cheer him up in his loneliness. Dr Lucas records that his father, also a physician in Burwell, was once driving round Swaffham Bulbeck in the 1850s when he saw brooms sticking out of the windows of a wine merchant's house. An invitation was sent down to the doctor to join the already large group of men gathered in the parlour drinking wine.

¹ *ibid.* Typescript with the name of Dr Charles Lucas appended.

² Typescript in Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

W. H. Barrett recalls that the same custom was observed in the Littleport Fens in his youth in the 1890s, although here a broom or mop was put out even if the wife was away only for the day. A great deal of home-made wine was consumed on these occasions.

Potato Bell Custom

A small bell, known locally as the *Ting-Tang Bell* or the *Potato Bell*, was, in the last century, rung in Great Abington at the end of Morning Prayer and before the Communion Service began in the parish church. The bell was a signal for housewives to put the potatoes on the stove to cook for the Sunday dinner.¹

Dolden Day Custom

It was recorded² in 1937 that a woman who was born in Lode in the 1880s could remember 'that on a certain day, known as Dolden Day' (she could not recall the exact date), 'the lady of Anglesey Abbey would distribute pennies to the children in school. Other adults also gave pennies.'

It may be that this name was another one for St Thomas's Day, when, as has been described under *Calendar Customs* gifts were made to old people in many villages. Alternatively the gifts may have been made in accordance with an old charity which, in course of time, disappeared: *Dolden* thus being a corruption of *Dole*.³

Public Penance

The ancient custom of making penance in public was observed in the parish church of Fen Ditton as late as 6th May 1849. A local gardener and former sexton named Edward Smith had, in 1847, when drinking overmuch in the local inn, made libellous statements concerning the chastity of the Rector's wife, a woman much younger than her husband, whose cook she had been before her marriage. It was not long before news of what Smith had said reached the lady concerned, who at once put the matter before the Ecclesiastical Court. Not until 1849 did the suit reach the Court of Arches, which sentenced Smith to do penance and to pay costs amounting to £42. 7s. 6d.

The sentence, when it became known, caused much excitement throughout the county, and on the day appointed for the performance of the penance about three thousand people went to Ditton, certain

¹ Recalled by members of the Women's Institute, 1954.

² Arch. E. Counties Folklore Soc.

³ *Dole*: . . . distribution, esp. of charitable gifts. *O.E.D.*

that they were going to see Smith standing in church wrapped in the traditional white sheet. Respectable inhabitants of Cambridge and the county, however, many of whom had applied for tickets for reserved seats, were dismayed to find, on arrival, that the church was already filled with a noisy disreputable crowd among whom were many labourers from Barnwell and lightermen from the barges. The pews and aisles were filled to overflowing; people clambered up on to the chancel screen, perched on the capitals of the pillars and even climbed on to the roof in an effort to get in through the windows, many of which had their panes smashed.

The Rector pleaded with his wife to call off the whole affair, but she refused, so at eleven o'clock the Reverend A. H. Small of Emmanuel College, followed by the Rector's wife, her lawyer and her husband, entered the church to begin Matins. There immediately followed scenes of the wildest confusion which almost beggared description by the reporters present from the various local newspapers.

The service was frequently interrupted by shouts from the rowdy congregation of 'Speak up, old boy', much laughter and many ribald comments, and the crowd having in time entirely filled the chancel the minister was forced to escape to the pulpit, where he hastily concluded the service and began to preach on the text 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'. Cat-calls, whistles, shouts and laughter, however, made his task an impossible one, for the crowd wanted only one thing—to see Smith come into the church and perform his penance. They knew that it was arranged that he should do this standing opposite the lectern, so, even as the preacher tried to make himself heard, they surged forward in their struggle to get a good view.

Then a shout from the huge mob gathered outside the church announced that Smith was on his way, so Mr Small left the pulpit, into which at once clambered as many people as could possibly manage to find a foothold.

To the accompaniment of cheers and hand-clapping Smith entered the church and when he finally reached the lectern he had to be lifted into one of the churchwarden's pews and, so that he should be visible to the crowd, made to stand on the seat on a hassock immediately opposite the Rector and his wife. Here he tried to read his recantation from the paper which he had been given, but was unable to proceed for the calls of 'Smith, Smith, one cheer more for Smith!' Finally the penitent appealed to one of the churchwardens for advice as to what he should do, and while the two men were

discussing the matter somebody found a broom in a corner and threw it. This was the signal for further violence: hassocks were thrown across the church and then the pews were torn up, broken into pieces and hurled in all directions.

Smith did his best to read, but scarcely one word of what he said could be heard above the din and it was only with difficulty that he could be seen through the smoke rising from the clay pipes which many in the crowd had lit up. His voice was finally drowned by the pealing of the bells whose dangling ropes had been seized by a group of men standing near them.

When Smith had at last struggled to the end of his recantation Mr Small quickly departed, struck as he went by a flying hassock. The penitent climbed down to the floor to be carried shoulder-high by the crowd, all shouting, 'Well done, Smith! Bravo, Smith!' out of the church and over to the Plough Inn. Here he announced to the throng pressing forward to shake his hand his regret that he could not invite them to dinner, as he was 'but a poor man'. Then he went to his home, saying he did not wish to cause any more disturbance.

The unhappy Rector, with his wife, retreated to the Rectory, followed by an angry shouting mob of people who presently took up stones and smashed nearly all the windows. All that afternoon and evening the Plough was filled with drinkers, while many people who had not been present at the morning's proceedings walked over from Cambridge and near-by villages to see the chaotic state in which the church had been left.

Throughout the day men went about with collecting boxes to raise the sum needed by Smith to pay his costs, and much more money than was needed must have been taken—indeed, several local farmers had already contributed to the cause. None of it, however, reached Smith, for in July he was imprisoned for five months in the County Gaol for non-payment of the costs before he was finally discharged as an insolvent debtor.

Dead Man's Shoes Custom

W. H. Barrett recalls that at the end of the last century the lightermen working on the river were always glad to obtain shoes taken from a dead man's feet, as these were believed to bring good luck.

Fenland and Isle of Aran Tradition

When W. H. Barrett was in training with the Royal Naval Division during the First World War there were among his companions a number of men from the Isle of Aran. He soon discovered that

some words common to the Fens of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk (e.g. *dwile*¹ for floor- or dish-cloth) were used both by him and the islanders.

One of the Aran men told him that there was a tradition that Oliver Cromwell had sent a regiment of Fenmen to Aran during his struggle with Ireland and had then forgotten all about them. Some of them eventually tried to reach the mainland in small fishing-boats which, in many cases, overturned in the rough seas. The remainder stayed on the island to farm and fish and marry local girls. A few of their descendants later went to America, but for the most part the others became merged with the people of Aran, though retaining, in many instances, the Christian names traditional in each of their original Fenland families. W. H. Barrett's informant was named Ely Fletcher, the name having been always given to the first-born son in each generation ever since the first exile had given it to *his* son in memory of the town in which he was living when he joined Cromwell's army.

Mill-naming Custom

When corn mills were so important to village life it was often the custom to refer to them by name, either by that of the owner (e.g. Old Heeks, at Burwell) or a nickname. Where more than one mill existed in a village the naming of a mill helped to distinguish one from the other in conversation—the 'Big' from the 'Little', for example.

In the Fens of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the numerous wind-driven drainage mills were similarly given names which were often a useful guide to the millwright when he was asked to carry out repairs to them. W. H. Barrett's grandfather, who was a millwright, possessed a map (since lost) showing, with their nicknames, all the drainage mills in the Fens of north Cambridgeshire. Among these still remembered are *Black Bess*, *Hooded Maria*, *Saucy Sally*, *Granny*, *Grand-dad*, *Baby* and *Tilly*—along the Hundred Foot River. Between Littleport and Brandon Creek were *Bullrush*, *Ape's Face*, and *Heartless*; *Big Susan*, *Bandy* and *Lousy Sall*; *Lucy*, *Liza* and *Shifty Jane*. *Duck* and *Goose* stood on the river Lark near Prickwillow; *Little Susan*, *Maggie*, *Frock Up* and *Frock Down* were among the mills by the Little Ouse near Brandon Creek.

¹ This word has always been associated, by Cambs. people, with Norfolk. The game of *dwile-flunking* which has recently been revived and which involves the hitting of players with a wet cloth, has been played in Suffolk and Essex in 1966-7, but not in Cambs.

Cabinet-maker's Custom

In the Cambridge Folk Museum is a 'bottle',¹ 12 inches high and 4 inches across the base, carved from a solid piece of oak. In the last century each new employee of John Swan & Son, cabinet-makers, upholsterers and auctioneers of Sidney Street, Cambridge, was handed the 'bottle' when he received his first week's wages, as a hint that he should then treat his fellow workers to a glass of ale.

St Blaise's Day Procession

St Blaise, Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia, who was martyred in *c.* 316, was the patron saint of woolcombers. On February 3rd, his feast day, processions were held in many parts of the country in his honour by those engaged in woolcombing. The *Cambridge Chronicle* of 8 February 1791 reported that 'the woolcombers of this place rode through the principal streets in grand procession, attended with flags and martial music, in commemoration of Bishop Blaize'.

The traditional association of the saint with the wool trade probably accounts for the naming of an inn, which stood from *c.* 1710 near the Spinning House in St Andrew's Street, the workhouse founded by Thomas Hobson for teaching the unemployed to spin and weave. The inn, the Bishop Blaize, was purchased in *c.* 1784 by Dr Richard Watson, Professor of Chemistry and later of Divinity, who in 1782 became Bishop of Llandaff. He converted the original premises to a residence called Llandaff House, now pulled down.

As Bishop, Dr Watson is said never to have visited his diocese during his thirty-four years' tenure of office, and his conversion of the Bishop Blaize Inn to a private house was the subject of a verse written by William Mansel, who later became Master of Trinity College and Bishop of Bristol:

Two of a trade can ne'er agree—
No proverb can be juster;
They've taken down Bishop Blaize, you see,
And put up Bishop Bluster.²

Story-telling Custom

One of the ways in which people have always found pleasant relaxation at the end of a day's work is in either listening to or narrating good stories over a glass of ale. Readers of W. H. Barrett's two collections of Fenland tales will recall that many of these were originally told in village and riverside inns.

As the evening progressed the tales tended to become more

¹ Plate 76.

² *Cambridge Portfolio*, ed. J. J. Smith, 1840.

exaggerated and improbable, and many elderly Cambridgeshire people, as well as W. H. Barrett, have recalled that it was customary to reward the narrators with some token of their listeners' appreciation. The award usually took the form of free beer, but there were other prizes—a 'silver' cup, crudely made of thin tin and suitably inscribed; a ribbon rosette or a medal. These were usually kept in the public house and solemnly handed to the teller of the story which was judged to be the 'tallest' of the evening.

In 1964 a blacksmith-made iron 'medal', shown on Plate 77, measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and bearing the words A NOTED LIAR, was found in the garden of the Pike and Eel at Chesterton. This inn was a popular meeting-place not only, as it still is, of local people, but also of the watermen who used to work on the barges and lighters which carried goods between King's Lynn and Cambridge. It is very probable that this medal was pinned to the coat of many a good story-teller.

Bull Running

The barbarous custom of letting a bull run loose in the streets to be pursued by dogs and men and women armed with sticks, clubs, and other weapons was observed in Wisbech until *c.* 1792.¹ The bull was let loose once a year from a building opposite Butchers' Row.

Protective Clay Figure

The discovery in *c.* 1940 of a small clay—or perhaps putty—figure in the roof of the University School of Anatomy, Downing Street, Cambridge, was described in 1965 by Miss M. Hume:

We were evacuated from our medical research laboratory in London early in the war and were lent accommodation for our stock animals in a room in the roof of the Anatomy School. I climbed up one day to fix a light shield over an electric stove and took hold of a beam running across the roof. My hand came on a little clay or putty man modelled lying on his back on the beam. I did not report his presence to the Professor as I dearly wish now that I had done.

My friend and colleague who was in charge of that room for the stock animals says that the senior laboratory men there knew of the little figure. They were secretive and protective towards him and had a decided feeling that he was important to safeguard our luck, particularly against the hazards of war.

Inquiries were made in November 1965 of Professor J. D. Boyd, who reported that the Principal Assistant and several assistants in the

¹ F. J. Gardner: *History of Wisbech and Neighbourhood, 1894-1898.*

School of Anatomy remembered the figure; one of them said that it was still there in 1962. Since then it has disappeared and no one knows what has become of it.

It will never be known when the figure was placed there. The School of Anatomy, however, was completed in 1938, and since the object was discovered soon after the outbreak of war in 1939 it may have been put there at the time of building. It cannot now be verified whether the little man was modelled in clay or putty and it is equally impossible to say whether the figure was merely the result of a workman making it for his own amusement or for any definite purpose. Certainly it appears that those who knew of its presence ascribed protective properties to it.

Meldreth Lark Silver

From the year 1279, and perhaps from before that date, an annual payment of 3s. Lark Silver and 10s. Common Fine or Fee Farm Rent was demanded of Meldreth by the officers of the Crown. In the eighteenth century the parish authorities seem to have become unwilling to make this payment, for which they could see no reason, and for some years they did, in fact, refuse to part with the required 13s. Then, following searches into the Exchequer Rolls in London, and on advice from a Cambridge lawyer, the sum demanded was, in 1728, duly paid together with the unpaid arrears of the preceding fourteen years. In the following century more inquiries were made into the matter, but these did not lead to a cessation of the payment.¹

On 15th December 1955 the *Cambridge Daily News* (now the *Cambridge News*) reported:

Because the Crown Commissioners have asked the South Cambridgeshire Rural District Council to consider the extinguishment of Meldreth's Lark Silver . . . the Council is asking the view of the Meldreth Parish Council.

A letter on the subject received by the Cambridge Folk Museum on 26 June 1967, from the Crown Estate Commissioners, states:

The two rents in question, the Common Fine of Meldreth and the Lark Silver of Meldreth were both offered for redemption to the South Cambridgeshire Rural District Council in 1955. This offer was declined. In 1960, however, the Council agreed to a redemption which was accordingly proceeded with.

The Common Fine of 10s. was a customary due paid originally by the villagers of Meldreth for the privilege they had of settling any

¹ W. M. Palmer: *Richard Willowes, Vicar of Meldreth*, 1924, pp. 18-20.

disputes in the local court of the Honour of Clare, instead of having to take them to Cambridge. The Lark Silver was money paid by the villagers in lieu of the presentation they made in early times at Christmas of 100 larks to the Earl of Clare. Once such payment was agreed upon it was legally binding unless on redemption by a twenty years' purchase.

Cattle Grazing Custom: Hinxton

In 1888 the ancient custom of pasturing cows on the common land in Hinxton, on the grass baulks separating the fields and on the sides of the roads aroused a great deal of interest in the village. It was recalled¹ that until earlier in the century, when many small dairies existed in Hinxton, the parish cowherd had daily blown a horn at daybreak as a signal that cows could be brought out to the common pasture. On 22 May 1888 a meeting was held in the village with the object of protecting such grazing privileges as still remained, and the Vicar, acting as Chairman, referred to the Act of Parliament of 1887 by which villagers were enabled to secure common pasture ground.

The meeting decided that a Hinxton Village Dairy Association be formed, consisting of local cowkeepers who did not occupy more than 20 acres of land, the object of the Association being to 'watch over and promote the supply of milk and free butter among the cottagers'. It was hoped, at a later meeting, that land might be rented for grazing and for use, also, as a recreation ground.

The *Whittlesford Parish Magazine* of August 1888 reported that, although it had been forbidden for some time by law to allow cows to graze by the roadside, it was clear that in Hinxton the ancient grazing privileges had never, in fact, been interfered with. It was thought, however, advisable to obtain guidance from the Chief Constable of the county, who assured the villagers that the old privileges could continue to be enjoyed provided that the cattle did not interfere with public traffic, that the owners of the grazing land raised no objection, and that the cows were properly supervised. The villagers, realising these conditions to be only right and sensible, agreed to continue with the observance of the old grazing customs 'which indirectly administer to the comfort and welfare of our cottage homes'.

¹ *Whittlesford Parish Magazine*, June 1888.

Select Glossary of Cambridgeshire Words in use within living memory

Back'us	Kitchen regions of farmhouse, esp. in Fens.
Bate	Measure of anything.
Bear's dung	Name given to the coprolites or phosphatic nodules dug up in S. Cambs. at end of the last century for fertilisers.
Beaver, bever	Mid-morning meal eaten by workers in fields, esp. in S. Cambs.
Blow	Blossom, esp. in Chrishall.
Brangle	Quarrel, dispute.
Buck-fisted	Clumsy.
Chimble	To crumble; used esp. of dry earth.
Chumble	To nibble; used esp. of rats and mice.
Chunter	To mutter, speak indistinctly.
Clung	Sticky; used esp. of wet clay.
Comical	Disagreeable, bad-tempered.
Dicky	Donkey.
Docky	Mid-morning meal (<i>v. beaver</i> above); or food eaten at midday by outdoor worker.
Doddy	Small.
Fen nightingales	Frogs.
Fleet	Shallow.
Fossils	Coprolites (<i>v. Bear's dung</i> above).
Fossiler	Coprolite digger.
Fourses	Meal eaten in afternoon by workers in fields, esp. in S. Cambs.
Frorn	Frozen.
Get shut, get shot of	Get rid of.
Gotch	Large earthenware jug.
Guilden Morden	A nosegay (used in Bassingbourn).
Gummidge	Scarecrow.

Hazled	Half dry; used in W. Cambs. of washing, formerly of land drying after ploughing.
Hodmedod	Snail; word now confined to Norfolk border of Cambs.
Housen	Houses.
Howsomever	However.
Jack Straw	Elevator for conveying corn to stack or granary. Name originally given to the man who carried straw from threshing-machine to stack.
Lob's Hole	Used in Chrishall of any place which is untidy.
Luck spinner	Small spider, often called a money spider.
May bee, May bug	Cockchafer. Also called a Midsummer daw.
Moggy	1. Cat. 2 (esp. in S. Cambs.). Mouse.
Nappy	Shallow brown earthenware baking dish.
Orts	Remains of food left over from a meal.
Parky	Cold; used of the weather.
Pod	Bag, usually of leather, used by farmers, esp. in Fens, for holding labourers' wages.
Prullick	Prepare to fight, esp. in S. Cambs.
Ranny	Vole or shrew.
Reasty	Rancid; used esp. of bacon.
Rere	Undercooked, esp. meat.
Roadster	A tramp.
Slop	A smock; also, in Fens, a sleeveless calico vest or the material used for making it.
Slud, slub	Wet mud.
Slummocky	Untidy in dress.
Tossled	Tangled.
Tract	Easy-going, good-natured.
Whaddon organs	Frogs.

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